

By the Same Author:

The Story of Ancient India

Buddhism and Asoka

Ancient India, History and Culture

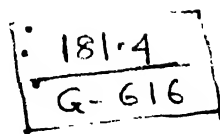
The Making of the Indian Nation

INDIAN THOUGHT THROUGH THE AGES

A Study of Some Dominant Concepts

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ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
BOMBAY · CALCUTTA · NEW DELHI · MADRAS
LONDON · NEW YORK

P R E F A C E

THE main purpose of the following pages is to attempt an examination of some of the dominant concepts that have influenced Indian thinking through the ages. It is neither a book on Indian history nor is it a collection of essays on Indian philosophy. The author's aim is more modest. It is to trace the development of certain concepts in the context of the history of India.

The concepts chosen for discussion are nine in number. In the first chapter is attempted a survey of Indian ideas on the concept of history and its interpretation. The next three chapters deal with three of the four ideals of life—*purusharthas*—which are rightly regarded as the basis of the Indian philosophy of life. *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama* are treated in separate chapters with a view to examine their changing contents and the possible correlation of events and ideas as revealed by a history of these concepts. The next two chapters have for their subject the three concepts which together make the Indian world-view. These are *Karma* and *Punarjanma*, and *Samsara*. Chapters seven and eight discuss ideas on political organization, ideas like those of authority and freedom, war and non-violence. The last chapter is a brief essay on the idea of the Man Perfected as it appears in the literature of ancient India and in some aspects of the thought of modern India.

It is possible that such a treatment may appear arbitrary. Indian thought ranges over a wide variety of subjects and represents intellectual activity extending through centuries. To treat the history of the country as a background for the development of certain selected concepts is obviously a hazardous undertaking. But, as stated earlier, the author is not discussing these concepts as metaphysical abstractions but living and changing ideas influencing the lives of millions of people through the ages. Philosophers are apt to point out the inadequacy of such a treatment of the subject from the point of view of their special discipline. Historians, on the other hand, are likely to feel that there is a weakness here for oversimplifications when ages are spoken of as units and

epochs of crises postulated without a detailed discussion of the causes and constituents of the crises under reference. But the author did not feel the necessity of either going into all the metaphysical implications of the concepts chosen by him for analysis or of attempting a detailed historical chronicle of events. He has assumed that his readers are conversant with the general meaning of the ideas introduced and, wherever possible and necessary, he has made cross-references to historical epochs and events so as to make the picture intelligible. The author was interested in asking a few legitimate questions concerning assumptions made whenever there is any discussion on aspects of Indian culture. Some of these questions are: what is the nature and extent of Indian "spirituality" which is generally taken as an explanation of economic poverty and backwardness afflicting the lives of millions of people? And what are the economic and political implications of the caste system enshrined in the concept of *Dharma*? Under what circumstances did the concept of pleasure become relegated to the background? And why do ideas of renunciation and other-worldliness appear from time to time in the history of ideas in India? Do they stem from certain political and economic causes? On the other hand the author was also interested in finding out the influence of ideas on events and determining, as far as possible, the extent of the influence of ideas on group behaviour. His main preoccupation has been to keep a firm hold both on concepts and events and attempt an inter-relationship between the two. The reader alone can judge how far he has succeeded in his task.

The author has drawn upon a wide variety of sources bearing on Indian thought and history, and the footnotes indicate the range of his sources. It is possible that many readers will find it difficult to agree with most of the author's conclusions, but if the work provokes further examination and discussion in the matter of a proper history of ideas in India, the author will feel amply rewarded.

In this work the author has received help from many friends. He is grateful to members of the Institute of Far Eastern and Slavic Studies and the Department of History at the University of Washington, for their interest in his work. He is grateful to Dr. Morris D. Morris of the Department of Economics for going

through the chapter on *Artha* and discussing it with him. He is also indebted to his wife Dr. Beena Gokhale, for helping him with the preparation of the index and text for publication. And finally the author would like to express his gratitude to the many authors on whose works he has so extensively drawn for material for this work.

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CHAPTER ONE

"THUS IT HAS BEEN"

The Indian View of History

I

IT WAS Goethe who once characterized history as "the most absurd of all things, a web of nonsense for the higher thinker".¹ Napoleon Bonaparte, though less uncharitable, was by no means less sceptical when he stated that history is nothing but a fable agreed upon. In spite of such lofty disdain working historians and readers of history proceed on the assumption that history and the sense of the historical have profoundly influenced human thought and action; that facts are the stuff of which history is made and that these facts, with certain qualifications, can be objectively studied and evaluated in terms of a consistent pattern of intelligibility. Obviously, history cannot encompass all the facts from the past; first of all, because all the facts are no longer available and secondly, even if they were available the very magnitude of their number would make it impossible for a single historian or a group of historians to work them into a convenient and intelligible pattern. And behind the events reported by historical facts are the ideas which have influenced the course of human action and determined the attitudes of groups and societies towards their environment and channelled their energy in a given direction. For every society its history is an attempt in search of significance of the present in the context of its past and history thus becomes an amalgam of events and ideas finding their expression in institutions and personalities. As Ludwig von Misses points out: "History deals with human actions performed by individuals and groups of individuals. It describes the conditions under which people lived and the way they reacted to these conditions. Its subjects are human judgements of value and the ends men aimed at guided by these judgements, the means men resorted to in order to attain

¹ Quoted in Karl Löwith's *Meaning in History*, p. 53

the ends sought and the outcome of their actions.”² Likewise Schiller observed that “the genuine history of mankind is the history of ideas. It is ideas that distinguish men from all other beings. Ideas engender social institutions, political changes, technological methods of production and all that is called economic conditions.”³ The late Dr. V. Gordon Childe stated that “the historical character of a process lies precisely in its self-determination”⁴ and this “self-determination” is an act of thought, an idea embodying itself into action. Professor R.G. Collingwood observed that history is “for” “human self-knowledge. It is generally thought to be of importance to man that he should know himself: where knowing himself means knowing not his merely personal peculiarities, the things that distinguish him from other men, but his nature as a man. Knowing yourself means, knowing, first, what it is to be a man; secondly, knowing what it is to be the kind of man *you* are and nobody else is. Knowing yourself means knowing what you can do; and since nobody knows what he can do until he tries, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done. The value of history, then, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is.”⁵

But even more significant than knowing what he is is perhaps the concept of what he thinks he has been, for man to correctly evaluate the history of his own becoming. While economic forces such as conditions of production and the distribution of material goods produced do influence the course of human history such conditions assume a decisive role only when consciously observed and interpreted for the purpose either of strengthening or changing them. The Buddhist *Dhammapadam*⁶ opens with a declaration that the “mental natures are the result of what we have thought. are chieftained by our thoughts, are made up of our thoughts” and the translator, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, parenthetically notes that the “influence of thought on human life and society is great. All that we are is the result of what we have thought. In one sense it is true that we live in a world of hard facts, but in a more important sense we live in a world of thoughts.”⁷ Ideas, thus, may be described as the “ultimate given of history”⁸ for “organized

² Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History*, p. 298

³ *Ibid*, p. 157 ⁴ *History*, p. 11 ⁵ *The Idea of History*, p. 10

⁶ *Dhammapadam*, I, 1

⁷ *Dhammapadam*, p. 58

⁸ Ludwig von Mises, *op. cit.* p. 188

social movements cannot appear and institutions cannot function without ideas. *They are the threads which bind the minds of men together sufficiently for joint action to occur.*"⁹

And of all ideas the idea of history and the sense of the historical are of crucial importance in an understanding of a people and their history. History, as stated earlier, is in a sense the quest for finding significance in the present in the context of the past and according as a people think of their history will be shaped their attitude to their world of experience. It would, therefore, be both proper and helpful if we began our survey of the history of ideas in India with an examination of the Indian ideas on history and the nature of the historical and ascertain the manner in which these ideas were influenced by other ideas associated with the concept of the world-view, of time, space and causality.

II

But such a proceeding is beset with obvious difficulties. The systematic writing of the history of India is of recent development. The beginnings of Indian historiography, properly so called, are dated around the years when the Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784. The efforts of Sir William Jones and others led to a rediscovery of the grandeur of India's past and the work of James Prinsep and General Cunningham obtained for Indian historiography the valuable critical instruments of epigraphy, numismatics and archaeology. On the Indian side it has been admitted that "in the past Indians laid little store by history"¹⁰ and that for "the longest period of Indian history, viz. from the earliest time to the Muslim conquest in the thirteenth century A.D., a period of about four thousand years, we possess no historical text of any kind, much less such a detailed narrative as we possess in the case of Greece, Rome and China."¹¹ India has had no Herodotus or Thucydides, it can only offer a shadowy Vyasa for a historian of one of the most memorable events of early Indian history, the Bharata War. The first firm date in Indian history is

⁹ Carl G. Gustavson, *A Preface to History*, p. 153

¹⁰ R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalkar (Eds.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. I, The Vedic Age, K.M. Munshi in his *Preface*, p. 10

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41

obtained only through the identification of the Sandrocotus of the Greek annals with Chandragupta Maurya of Indian tradition before the beginnings of whose career in 326 B.C. all dates are conjectural. Ancient India produced a vast range of literature of which the *Puranas*, the life of Harsha by Bana and the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana alone may be regarded as strictly historical works. To this scanty list we may add certain dramas which have historical subjects. These are the *Malavika-Agnimitra* of Kalidasa and the *Mudra-rakshasa* of Vishakhadatta. Kalidasa takes up the story of the love affairs of the Shunga king Agnimitra for the subject of his plot while the *Mudra-rakshasa* narrates the story of the dynastic revolution whereby the Nandas were overthrown by Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya dynasty (324-184 B.C.). The list may be further enlarged with the inclusion of a few other sources like the *Devi-Chandraguptam* which details the tragic fall of a Rama Gupta, believed to be a son of the mighty Samudra Gupta of the Imperial Gupta dynasty (A.D. 319-550). But the list is far from impressive. There are the interesting inscriptions of Asoka and the Satavahanas and the Guptas and all the other dynasties which held sway over parts of India in ancient times but the chronological sequence of events mentioned in them is to be deduced from certain synchronic facts noticed from the history of other countries and climes. Many of the kings reckoned years of their reigns in their own computation since there was no fixed single era valid all over the country. That is because of the fact that "the use of an era was introduced and popularised in India by foreign rulers".¹² Such eras are the first and second Shaka eras. The Gupta era was used by the Guptas and some of their feudatories and ends with the dynasty itself. What we have, then, in early Indian times, is an approach to historiography rather than a proper writing of history. Upendra Nath Ghoshal, in a scholarly attempt to survey the growth of early Indian historiography comments on "the mixture of mythology and folk-lore" in the *Vedas* and refers to their implicit acceptance "of the operation of supernatural forces on human affairs, in their slight attention to topography and their almost complete neglect of chronology."¹³

¹² Majumdar and Pusalkar, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 144, Note 1

¹³ Upendra Nath Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, pp. 37-38. [footnote continued opposite

However, the Vedic material does show an approach to historiography preserving as it does fragments of traditional history. Buddhist literature, likewise, contains elements of genuine historical writing mixed up with much legendary and dogmatic matter. The *Puranas* enable us to prepare "a skeleton outline of the royal genealogies" but their defects as historical records are obvious. And they are genealogies and not histories as we understand the term today. Bana, otherwise admirable as a literary craftsman, shows a lamentable neglect of chronology and topography and shares with the other writers of classical Sanskrit an "unquestioned belief in the operation of supernatural forces upon the course of human affairs".¹⁴ And then there is his inability to distinguish legend from history. Only Kalhana (middle of the 12th century A.D.) comes close to being a critical historian with his precise topographical information and high regard for chronology at least for the recent period of which he speaks in his *Rajatarangini*.

This absence of history and historical awareness becomes very intriguing when it is remembered that ancient India showed a much better scientific record in other fields of human endeavour. Ancient Indian mathematics and astronomy, medicine and chemistry, metallurgy and engineering, were in no way inferior to the state of these sciences elsewhere. It may be argued that historical records suffered destruction through the operations of an unkind climate and hostile man from time to time. Tradition asserts that almost every king had his court panegyrist and chronicler and

That the state of affairs with the ancient Egyptians was not very much different can be seen from the following observations of Ludlow Bull who states that "the ancient Egyptians cannot have had an 'idea of history' in any sense resembling what the phrase means to thinkers of the present age or perhaps of the last 2,400 years. They do not seem to have developed a philosophy of history so far as can be observed in the surviving fragments of their literature. They do not seem to have thought in terms of cause and effect or of trends that were observable in their own story or in those of neighbouring peoples in the ancient world." See "Ancient Egypt"; Roland C. Denton (Ed), *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven, 1955), p. 32. In ancient China too, in spite of the existence of a long historical tradition the combination of the roles of the astrologer and historian into one office indicated that historiography was understood more as a matter of compiling chronicles than writing of history properly so-called. See Han Yu-Shan, *Elements of Chinese Historiography*,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142

Hiuen Tsiang mentions the existence of records in every province.¹⁵ Writing was known in ancient India at least since the 7th century B.C. if not earlier and the *Arthashastra* refers to the existence of official records and officers in charge of such records. The Gupta inscriptions mention the office of a *Mahaakshapatalika*, the imperial record-keeper¹⁶ while the inscriptions of Samchi and Barhut¹⁷ indicate the wide prevalence of the profession of a writer. The tradition of literacy, whatever its limitations, was a vital tradition in ancient India. This literate tradition was reinforced by a strong oral tradition which was responsible for the continued preservation of a large number of religious and secular works. In view of this it may be argued that many works of history or proto-history were compiled but were lost due to the vagaries of an unkind climate and the destructive fury of wars, invasions and revolutions from which the country suffered from time to time. But this explanation does not fit the situation adequately. India learnt, unlike China, the use of paper at a comparatively late date and the sources for the manufacture of paper were rather scarce. The materials generally used for writing were palm-leaves, cloth-strips, wood, copper-plates and clay. These were 'naturally limited in their wide utility both by their relative paucity and the cumbersome technique involved in the manufacture. In the case of palm-leaves and similar fragile and perishable material it may be conceded that climate must have been largely responsible for their disappearance if such existed at all. But there have been reports of large hoards of palm-leaf manuscripts located in various parts of the country and from one such collection came the manuscript of the long-lost *Arthashastra* of Kautilya which was edited and published in the twenties of the present century. Historical works, however, have not been traced among any of the hoards so far and it is too much to assume that whereas works on religion and theology, polity and law, literature and the arts have survived, only historical works were singled out by weather and man for utter destruction. Even in the matter of documents on clay seals India is not as fortunate as Assyria or Babylon. For all its great-

¹⁵ Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, p. 78

¹⁶ See R. Shamasastri, (Trans) *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, pp. 71-75; *Epigraphia Indica*, XIX; p. 103

¹⁷ See J. Marshall and A. Foucher, *The Monuments of Samchi*, I, p. 304

ness the Indus Civilization has to show only a few hundred clay seals with a marginal literary content. D.D. Kosambi explains the paucity of documents from the Indus culture as due to regulation “presumably by the temple, without the stimulus of heavy competition or even the need to keep annals, records or contracts over long periods of time” in the economic life of that civilization. A similar absence of competition and an all-pervasive control of economic activity by the state may explain the absence of commercial documents from the other periods of ancient Indian history. Numerous copper-plate grants from the Gupta and Chola periods throw a flood of light on land-relations in the context of the economy of religious institutions. These charters have survived because of their obvious economic and legal value but such copper-plates would be a prohibitively expensive affair for the recording of detailed economic activity by the state.

The conclusion is inescapable that ancient India did not develop a historical tradition or a historical awareness in the same way as the Greeks and Romans, Chinese and the Arabs. Perhaps a part of the explanation for the absence of this tradition of history may be sought in the nature and structure of the intellectual classes that dominated the life of ancient India. The village, a religion of a ritualistic kind and the Sanskrit language dominated the intellectual and emotional life of ancient India at least since the 2nd century B.C. The ancient Indian literati were invariably pre-occupied with religion and ritual and unlike the Arabs were little interested in the life of the common people either in war or at peace. As Kosambi points out: “The Sanskrit because its chief propogator, teacher, innovator was the Brahmin who had in the main to supply recruits to the priesthood is based in the same way upon love and religion, which constitute the common interest of Brahmin and prince.”¹⁸ Sanskrit was seldom the common language of the large masses of the people of India. This fact was recognized by Asoka who drafted his inscription in the Prakrits easily understood by his subjects for whom they were intended. Later the tradition changed and Sanskrit became the vehicle for epigraphic compositions which were ornate without being intelligible for the common run of people. And that is the reason why the curses for violation of temple and religious endowments in late ancient and medieval times were worded in the Prakrits of the

¹⁸ D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 262

area rather than in Sanskrit so that the vital part of the inscription may be understood by all. The adoption of classical Sanskrit as a literary vehicle was, in some ways, responsible for the intellectual atrophy which set in the life of ancient India towards the end. The mark of the classical Sanskrit author, as pointed out by Ghoshal¹⁹ is his inability to distinguish between legend and history which meant his failure to discriminate between mythology and facts. The priests were more interested in *atman* and *brahman*, the individual and cosmic self, in the doings of gods and demons, in the precise order of laying ritual material in a religious ceremony than in the deeds of mere men on fields of battle and across the sub-continent. Classical Sanskrit is an excellent vehicle for the expression of subtle ideas, in rhetorical flourish and in the methodology of the *sutra* style which led to the tradition of writing commentaries on commentaries without letting the creative genius indulge in original and precise thinking related to more mundane matters. Sanskrit is often described as the *devabhasha* (Heavenly language) and it had to pay the penalty for that status by curbing the growth of historical and scientific works. The theories of *yuga*, *avatara*, *samsara* and *moksha* led to the development of a peculiar historical consciousness and a view of history very much of a different order than that displayed by the Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Chinese. The triple domination of theology, priesthood and the classical Sanskrit language led to the postulation of a world-view which seems to have had something to do with a different view of history.

III

The absence of historical works in ancient India has been attributed by some to the peculiar world-view developed by the Hindus. Says the Reverend Bryan de Koster, "Hindu man has no sense of a decisive or significant 'now' in any historical event. When a man believes that his life reaches back into the infinite past and that his future is equally limitless, he can have no awareness of a need for critical action. Unlimited historical life must 'sag' under the burden of an endless vista of recurrent existence. And secondly, a cyclic interpretation of history, destroys the meaningfulness of life, and because of its origins are in *avidya* its 'end'

¹⁹ *op. cit.*, pp. 141-154

can have no true value. In the final analysis, Hinduism reduces all life to a fatuity. History is mere froth and bubble."²⁰ Apart from the questionable assumption implicit in such an oversimplification of a complex theory of existence ancient Greece too seems to have suffered from some such metaphysical load if Professor R G Collingwood is to be believed. Says Collingwood 'Ancient Greek thought as a whole has a very definite prevailing tendency not only uncongenial to the growth of historical thought but actually based, one might say, on a rigorously anti historical metaphysics. History is a science of human action, what the historian puts before himself is things that men have done in the past, and these belong to a world of change, a world where things come to be and cease to be. Such things, according to the prevailing Greek metaphysical view, ought not to be knowable and therefore history ought to be impossible."²¹ But do we not have the development of history and historical thought in Greece in spite of such a metaphysical imperative being ranged against it? Albert Schweitzer contrasts the European world-view with the Indian world-view characterizing the former as predominantly world and life affirming while the latter is world and life negating. "World and life affirmation" he states, "consists in this that man regards existence as he experiences it in himself and as it has developed in the world as something of value *per se* and accordingly strives to let it reach perfection in himself, whilst within his own sphere of influence he endeavours to preserve and to further it." As against this "world and life negation on the other hand consists in his regarding existence as he experiences it in himself and as it developed in the world as something meaningless and sorrowful and he resolves accordingly (a) to bring life to a standstill in himself by mortifying his will-to-live and (b) to renounce all activity which aims at improvement of the conditions of life in this world."²² The proposition is so apparently convincingly spelled out that it is tempting in its attraction. However, as Schweitzer himself states Europe too had its periods of life-affirmation and life-negation and it is only in comparatively recent times, since the emergence of the capitalist ethos that life-affirmation has triumphed over life-negation in large areas over which the

²⁰ Bryan De Krester, *Man in Buddhism and Christianity* pp 20, 27

²¹ *op cit*, p 20

²² Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, pp. 1-2

European civilization holds sway. And again the most influential single book for Hindu India has been the *Bhagavadgita* whose message has certainly been that of action rather than renunciation of action. As Radhakrishnan explains it all through the *Gita* Krishna emphasizes "the need for action. He does not adopt the solution of dismissing the world as an illusion and action as a snare. He recommends the full active life of man in the world with the inner life anchored in the Eternal Spirit. The *Gita* is therefore a mandate for action. It explains what a man ought to do not merely as a social being but as an individual with a spiritual destiny."²³ It seems to us, therefore, that simple postulates like world-affirmation or world-negation are inadequate for the situation in which the absence of a sense of the historical may be understood.

But perhaps the question may be differently framed! Instead of labouring the seeming absence of the sense of the historical can we not approach the problem from a different angle? May we not ask: of what order is the understanding of history and the historical awareness in Indian thought? For, it is possible to argue that the sense of history, in order to be an historical awareness, need not be necessarily single-dimensional. A.C. Bouquet suggests three prerequisites for the valuation of the historical namely, folk-memory, keeping of records and a capacity to compare with one another things that are remembered and recorded.²⁴ The *Puranas* may be described as residual folk-memory and there is good evidence of the tradition of keeping records. Kalhana shows a remarkable ability to compare with one another things that are remembered and recorded. Ibn Khaldun defines history as "in reality information about human society which is the culture of the world (in its diverse aspects)."²⁵ Collingwood notes that the processes of history "are not processes of mere events but processes of actions which have an inner side, consisting of processes of thought; and what the historian is looking for is these processes of thought. All history is the history of thought."²⁶ In

²³ S. Radhakrishnan (Trans), *The Bhagavadgita* (New York, 1956 ?), p. 66

²⁴ A.C. Bouquet, "The Valuation of the Historical", *Radhakrishnan—Comparative Studies in Philosophy*, printed in honour of his 60th birthday (Ed) by W.R. Inge and others, pp. 155ff.

²⁵ Franz Rosenthal (Trans), *Ibn Khaldun The Muqaddimah* I, p. 71

²⁶ *op. cit.*, p. 115

a sense the Indian view of history operates on a different dimension altogether basing its thought on the assumption that history is not merely events but much more a history of processes of thought and attitudes, of *ideas* and *cultures*. It is in this sense that time is divided into yugas, vast units encompassing thousands of years which assume intelligibility and significance only as processes of cultures. Traditionally there are four yugas namely, the *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dwapara* and *Kali* and each has its own *dharma* which may be described as a structure or concatenation of duties and values.²⁷ And the history of these processes of cultures are recorded in the myths, mythologies and proto-histories.

IV

The Indian terms for history and the historical are *Itihasa*, *Purana* and *Akhyana*. The *Mahabharata* is described as all three. *Itihasa* literally means “thus it happened” and is synonymous with the term history as we understand it today. *Purana* is “ancient”, a mythological account of the manifold levels of life and *akhyana* is legend or story. A *purana* has five sections: (a) original creation (*sarga*), (b) dissolution and recreation (*pratisarga*), (c) Manu-cycles (*manvantara*), comprising fourteen periods of time with a presiding sage for such period, (d) ancient genealogies (*vamsha*) and (e) accounts of persons mentioned in the genealogies (*vanshanucharita*).²⁸ *Itihasa* is defined as: *Dharma-artha-kama-mokshanam-upadesha-samanvitam; purva-vrittanta katha-yuktam itihastam prachakshyate*.²⁹ Freely rendered it means history is that narrative of the past which exemplifies the fulfilment of the four ideals of life namely *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Since the following chapters discuss the structure and role of the ideas associated with *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* in Indian history and life it is not necessary to discuss them in detail here. Suffice it to say that *dharma* means a code of conduct, laws, duties and obligations, *artha* means economic welfare, *kama* implies biological fulfilment and cultural happiness while *moksha* conveys liberation or salvation from the round of existence. It is interesting to note here that along with the economic and cultural aspects of human life the ethical and spiritual values as understood

²⁷ *Manavadharmasastra*, I, pp. 81-86 ²⁸ U.N. Ghoshal, *Op. Cit.*, p. 51

²⁹ See Apte's *Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 276

in ancient India have also been included as legitimate parts of history. And the archetype of all the itihāsas is the *Mahabharata* described by the late Dr. V.S. Sukthankar as the "substance of our collective unconscious".³⁰ The subject of the *Mahabharata*, it is worth emphasizing here, is not merely to record a historical event like the great war but also to unfold the drama of human life as it culminated in the war itself. In this the epic assumes cosmic overtones and unfolds a vista in which gods rub shoulders with men and a war stands at the parting of one yuga from another. Similarly the *Ramayana* is not just an epic on the life of a single individual and the vicissitudes of fortune to which he was subjected but is "essentially a history of expansion" whereas the *Mahabharata* is a chronicle of "consolidation" in socio-economic and cultural terms.³¹ The *Puranas* operate on a level different from the one on which the epics dwell. In the first three sections they deal with history in a mythological sense and an altogether different conception of time pervades the mythologies. In fact, "their units of time, the flow of time, its duration and tempo, were not the same as ours. The time of mythologies, had a larger rhythm and a larger interval."³² But for that reason there is no need to reject them completely and out of hand as un-historical for if chronology or archaeology, the two essential indices of history, "be called the vertical co-ordinate, myths and mythologies form the horizontal one".³³ These "horizontal co-ordinates" do possess a substratum of history which is largely social and cultural in its implications. The emphasis, therefore, seems to be more on a historical apprehension of culture-systems, their growth and decay, than on purely dynastic history which is the subject of the last two sections of the structure of the *Puranas*. The Buddhist *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* and the Jain chronicles show both a historical awareness of the unique missions of Gautama, the Buddha and Mahavira, the Jina and also show a due awareness of historical time which is reckoned in terms of the Buddha and Mahavira eras.

It was Franklin Edgerton who pointed out the two habits of thought, almost two views of life existing alongside of each other in traditional Indian thinking.³⁴ These may be described as the

³⁰ *The Meaning of the Mahabharata*, pp. 68-69 ³² *Ibid.*, p. 63

³¹ D.P. Mukerji, *On Indian History*, p. 61 ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 65

³⁴ See Franklin Edgerton, "Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Indian

"ordinary" and the "extraordinary" forming two separate norms of valuation and judgement. History is concerned with the "ordinary" norm of reckoning whereas the "extraordinary" is related to the central affirmation of the Indian metaphysics namely, "the affirmation of the supreme identity of man, in the real depths of his selfhood, with the highest transcendental reality."³⁵ The "ordinary" and the "extraordinary" interpenetrate for the *Nara* may become *Narottama* and ultimately *Narayana* as Radha Kamal Mukerji argues.³⁶ History, in such a view, then, may not always be preoccupied with a "now" for it takes for its theme the transformation in the nature of man from being a hero into Immutable Goodness and his final absorption into the Deity. History assumes cosmic overtones, though for the most part, through the instrumentality of the theory of avatara it is firmly rooted into the firm ground of ascertainable facts and events.

The "ordinary" level of awareness is also concerned both with mutability and eternity and it is the task of history to interpret the cultural and spiritual continuity in this world-process through the inter-relations of dharmas and yugas. History, as the ancient Sanskrit definition points out, is the fulfilment of ideas and values which are eternal in terms of time which is finite and fragmented. "Events" says Vijñānabikṣhu, "stand in relation of time and space";³⁷ the Vaiśeṣhikas regard time "as the independent real pervading the whole universe and making the ordered movement of things possible".³⁸ "Time" points out Heinrich Zimmer, "is a becoming and vanishing, the background and the element of the transient, the very frame and content of the floating processes of the psyche and its changing, perishable objects of experience."³⁹ The Jains speak of time in terms of ascending and descending cycles—*avāśarpini* and *utsarpini*—and as a constituent of the universe making changes possible.⁴⁰ For the Buddhists time is relative, *samaya*. Buddhaghosa, the celebrated Pali commentator

Culture", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1942 (Vol. LXII), pp. 151-156

³⁵ Floyd H. Ross, *The Meaning of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 21

³⁶ Radha Kamal Mukerji, *A History of Indian Civilization*, I, p. 4 cf. the popular saying "*Nar karni kare to nar ka Narayan ho jay*"—If man acts he may even be God.

³⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, II, p. 277 ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193

³⁹ *Philosophies of India*, p. 450 ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225, Note

explains: "Time is only a concept derived from this or that phenomenon"⁴¹ and it is interesting to notice here that the term *samaya* also stands for causal relation. While discussing the term *Buddhaghosa* sets forth the Buddhist theory of multilateral causation calling it "harmony of antecedents". By "harmony of antecedents" is meant the mutual contribution of related phenomena in the process of the production of a given result. The Buddhists rejected theism and were interested in the refutation of the theory of single causes. That such a view was not restricted to psycho-ethical speculations of the Abhidhamma school is indicated by its use in other contexts such as explanations of the appearance of the Buddha which is always regarded as a "historical" event. But Buddhahood is as much historical as quasi-cosmic for it is both unique and repetitive. In the latter aspect historiography becomes indistinguishable from theology and cosmology as in the Mahayana where the Mahayanist theologians reveal the vastness of their cosmology. Time for them is beginningness and the innumerable universes, every one of them supporting sentient beings of every possible variety, are born, evolve and die, only to repeat the same cycle again and again. The dividing line between theology and history, however, is the one indicated by the test of immediacy the sense of which is conveyed by the terms *dittheva dhamme*—here and now. Theology becomes history when the eternal assumes the forms of the immediate or the historical and its manifestation is placed within the framework of time, place and events. In other words it is only when the eternal becomes that history begins its course.

A similar view is propounded in the theory of avatara. The term avatara is derived from *ava* + *ti* which means descent or act of descending. Radhakrishnan explains thus: "Avatara means descent, one who has descended. The divine comes down to the earthly plane to raise it to a higher status. God descends when man rises. The purpose of the avatara is to inaugurate a new world, a new dharma. By his teaching and example, he shows how a human being can raise himself to a higher grade of life. The issue between right and wrong is a decisive one. God works on the side of the right. Love and mercy are ultimately more powerful than hatred and cruelty. Dharma will conquer adharma, truth will conquer falsehood; the power behind death,

⁴¹ *Atthasālini* (Commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgini*) pp. 33ff

disease and sin will be overthrown by the reality which is Being, Intelligence and Bliss."⁴² Sri Aurobindo, however, emphasizes that among the functions of an avatara the upholding of dharma is not an all-sufficient object in itself, not the supreme possible aim for the manifestation of a Christ, a Krishna, a Buddha, but is only the general condition of a higher aim and a more supreme and divine utility. For there are two aspects of the divine birth; one is descent, the birth of God in humanity, the Godhead manifesting itself in the human form and nature of the eternal avatara; the other is ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the Divine nature and consciousness, *madbhavam agatah*; it is the being born anew in a second birth of the soul. We have referred earlier to the interpenetrability of the "ordinary" and "extraordinary" levels of awareness, the mundane and the metaphysical. Sri Aurobindo speaks of ascent and descent and there is reason to think that the concept of an avatara was not just a theological incursion into historical thinking but was a part and parcel of a composite mode of thinking which encompassed diverse levels of consciousness. It is interesting to recall here that a Buddhist Emperor like Asoka entertained ideas very similar to the intermingling of the divine and human under certain conditions of righteousness for he speaks in his Maski Rock Edict that "in Jambudvipa, the gods who had formerly no relations with men have now been associated with men" which compares favourably with Cicero's definition of the world (*universus hic mundus*) as a commonwealth of gods and men.⁴³ The theory of the avataaras appears in a full-fledged form for the first time perhaps in the *Bhagavat-Gita* (IV, 6, 7, 8) where Krishna says to Arjuna: "Though (I am) unborn, and My self (is) imperishable, though (I am) the Lord of all creatures, yet establishing myself in my own nature, I come into (empiric) being through my power (*maya*). Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age."⁴⁴ The key-words are

⁴² S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 155

⁴³ N.A. Nikam and McKeon, Richard (Eds.), *The Edicts of Asoka*, pp. 49-50 and Note

⁴⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, pp. 153-155

lord of beings (*bhutanam ishvaro*) who comes 'into being (*sambhavamī*) which though in the nature of a paradox is quite intelligible under some assumptions. If taken literally, how can *Ishvara* who is the Supreme Being become (*sambhava*)? is a question that is legitimate. The only answer to such a question would be that in this there is implicit a view of history which states that when Being becomes history begins for the appearance of Being in becoming is the beginning of a new yuga which is a historical-cultural period. Gandhiji explains the paradox in the following words: "Here is comfort for the faithful and affirmation of the truth that Right ever prevails. An eternal conflict between Right and Wrong goes on. Sometimes the latter seems to get the upperhand, but it is Right which ultimately prevails. The good are never destroyed, for Right—which is Truth—cannot perish; the wicked are destroyed, because Wrong has no independent existence. Knowing this let man cease to arrogate to himself authorship and eschew untruth, violence and evil. Inscrutable Providence—the unique power of the Lord—is ever at work. This in fact is avatara incarnation. Strictly speaking there can be no birth for God."⁴⁵ But this does not fully take cognizance of the two key-words mentioned above namely that while Krishna insists on calling himself the Lord of creatures and follows it up by using the term *sambhavamī* which can be correctly rendered only as becoming or become. And then there is the term yuga which we have seen as being used as a synonym for an age. The Medieval European historiographers argued in the same vein when they asserted that "History, as the will of God, orders itself, and does not depend for its orderliness on the human agent's will to order it. Plans emerge, and get themselves carried into effect, which no human being has planned; and even men who think they are working against the emergence of these plans are in fact contributing to them."⁴⁶ The Hindu view of history is stated in a somewhat modified form when it says that when Being becomes history begins, for the intervention of the divine in human affairs is brought about by the increasing degeneracy of man from which God saves him. In this context we may refer to the concept of divinity of kingship which was already accepted as early as the

⁴⁵ Mahadev Desai, *The Gospel of Selfless Action or The Gita According to Gandhi*, p. 196

⁴⁶ See R.G. Collingwood, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53

early centuries of the Christian era. “I reside” says Vishnu, “in the consecration of a king”;⁴⁷ the king is formed out of particles of various divinities.⁴⁸ Samudra Gupta, the Imperial Gupta ruler, is described in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription, as a god come down to earth for the fulfilment of specific functions.⁴⁹ The consecration of the king, then, is the recurring establishment of the contact between the divine and mundane and history (itihasa) in this context is described as a narrative of the past exemplifying the fulfilment of the four ideals of life as noted earlier.

History, in such thinking, therefore, acts simultaneously on two planes, the temporal and the divine and the two are interconnected. In such a view history becomes infused with a purpose higher than merely to record the rise and fall of dynasties and the succession of wars and revolutions which hyphenate the chronicle of mere man. But, then, what is the dividing line between history, as we understand the term today and mythology, or a philosophy of history as distinct from theology? Frankly, such a line is both shifting and uncertain. The predilection of genealogy-makers of ancient India to trace back the history of their patrons to mythological heroes and the sun and the moon is an instance in point. The origin is divine though the actions of the subjects are very much human. This intermingling of the human and divine is as much a part of Hindu theological thinking as of the historical awareness. The Vedic gods are anthropomorphic in varying degrees and this anthropomorphism persists through the ages. The tales of Rama and Krishna as of Samudra Gupta or Yashodharman are as much human as they are charged with divine overtones wherein mythology and history become two sides of the same coin. History, thus, is a narrative of an age rather than of a dynasty and where an age is concerned what is more important are the processes of ideas, thoughts, values and cultures rather than wars and revolutions, foundation and dissolution of dynasties. The latter are but marginal notes to the grand chronicle of the yuga. History as we understand the term, deals with Nara while

⁴⁷ *Vishnudharmasastra*, XCIX, 16

⁴⁸ U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, p. 543

⁴⁹ J. Fleet (Ed), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, Gupta Inscriptions, Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta, 8-*Lokadhamno devasya*, R.C. Majumdar, and A.S. Altekar (Eds), *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, *The Gupta-Vakataka Age*, p. 269

the true function of history as understood in the thought of ancient India was to describe the transformation of Nara into Narottama and his final absorption into Narayana.

V

With the introduction of Islam a different view of history is introduced. The aim now is to trace the progress of Islam through the 'histories of the various Muslim kings who were the missionaries of Islam bent on turning the *Dar-ul-harb* into *Dar-ul-Islam*. The Arab historians were not priests of gods but commentators who had wide contacts with the common people as well as royalty. The *Hegira* was the greatest Watershed which gave significance to events after A.D. 622. The Muslim historians, therefore, were firmly rooted to chronology and were intimately concerned with the fortunes of the sultans who were, theoretically, the instruments for the extirpation of idolatry. In this tradition, then, we begin to get real historical chronicles, albeit onesided, which are full of information on the various periods which witnessed the vicissitudes of Islam in India. With the Mughal period we have a brilliant series of biographies and chronicles beginning with the *Baburnama* and going on to the *Siyar-i-mutkharin*. There is no dearth of historical documents; on the other hand their profusion is sometimes bewildering.

As stated earlier it was in the closing decades of the 18th century that the systematic rediscovery of India's past began under the impetus given by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. By the middle of the 19th century the great epigraphical and archaeological discoveries were beginning to be made and by the end of the century and the opening decades of the present century Indian and Western historians had written the long history of India on a modern scientific basis. The preoccupation so far has been with the utilization of the historical material discovered in Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, French, Portuguese and Dutch languages. There has been little time for formulating a definite philosophy of history. Along with Western techniques of historical interpretation Western ideas on the nature, content and purposes of history have also been assimilated and it is to be hoped that in the near future a distinct Indian view of history in the modern sense of the term, will emerge. But there is so much

work to be done that for a considerable time at least academic historians will feel that to go into the problem of an Indian view of history will mean diversion of attention from the more urgent task of writing of history for which vast hordes of material still lie untouched. However it will be relevant to survey such attempts as have been made so far to determine the meaning of history in the context of the Indian experience.

These attempts have been mainly in two distinct directions. The first is in the direction of a spiritual interpretation of the Indian historical experience. This has been the view of Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Sri Aurobindo argues that three dominant qualities have shaped the evolution of Indian history and civilization. These are: (a) India's "stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginably prolific creativeness"; (b) spirituality which is "the master-key of the Indian mind" and (c) the "strong intellectuality, at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail." Whereas these three factors have influenced great creative periods "three movements of retrogression" were responsible for the Indian decline. These were (a) "a sinking of that superabundant vital energy and a fading of the joy of life and the joy of creation"; (b) "a rapid cessation of the old free intellectual activity, a slumber of the scientific and the critical mind as well as the creative intuition" and (c) spirituality manifesting itself in "a dispersed action which replaces the old magnificent synthesis and in which certain spiritual truths are emphasized to the neglect of others." He further points out another characteristic of the Indian mind which makes it "follow each motive, each specialization of motive even, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, vital, to its extreme point and to sound its utmost possibility." And finally "the Indian mind is not only spiritual and ethical, but intellectual and artistic, and both the rule of the intellect and the rhythm of beauty are hostile to the spirit of chaos" and under the influence of the synthetical tendency the Indian mind "returns always towards some fusion of the knowledge it has gained and to a resulting harmony and balance in action and institution."⁵⁰ Thus, while not overtly rejecting the influence of economic forces in the

⁵⁰ *The Renaissance of India* (reprinted from the *Arya*, August-November, 1918), pp. 7-29

making of Indian history, Sri Aurobindo would suggest the 'primacy of spiritual and intellectual forces as a dominant theme in an understanding of the chronicle of the country's long history. Upendra Nath Ghoshal takes these characteristics of Indian history as stated by Sri Aurobindo and works out their implications in some detail through the Ancient, Muslim and British periods of Indian history.⁵¹

Mahatma Gandhi argues about the significance of history in terms of the unfolding of the twin principles of Truth and non-violence. Whenever man acts in answer to the imperatives of these principles there is progress; decline comes about when there is an interruption of these forces. He says "History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the forces of love or of the soul" and that "the sum total of the energy of mankind is not to bring us down but to lift us up, and that is the result of the definite, if unconscious, working of the law of love." "Human society" says Gandhi "is a ceaseless growth, an unfoldment in terms of spirituality." He states that "if we turn our eye to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards *ahimsa*. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for his food.' Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and from member of a family he became member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive *ahimsa* and diminishing *ahimsa*." He believes that "man as animal is violent, but as Spirit is non-violent" and though from time to time man has lapsed into a state of predatory violence, man has to awaken, sooner or later, to his real nature. For, "nothing in this world is static; everything is kinetic. If there is no progression, then there is inevitable retrogression. No one can remain without the eternal cycle, unless it be God Himself."⁵² Gandhi's view of history, thus, is essentially ethical and spiritual and comes close to the ancient Indian view that human history is

⁵¹ *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, pp. 256-274

⁵² See Nirmal Kumar Bose (Ed.), *Selections from Gandhi*, pp. 21-23



the unfolding of man's waywardness constantly checked by divine will and love.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the doyen of Indian philosophers today, offers a highly intellectualized and spiritualized view of history. He says "Philosophers claim to establish history as a realm in which the freedom of man may be demonstrated as against the autocracy of nature. Professor Collingwood argues that historical thought is the discovery of individuality which is freedom. Modern historical investigation, however, has discovered in increasing measure the predominance of geographical, economic, social and other causes even in the most outstanding of human achievements. It is argued that man and his civilization are merely the products of natural and material forces. This view is not peculiar to Marx." His own stand, however, is stated in the following words: "The meaning of history is to make all men prophets to establish a kingdom of free spirits. The infinitely rich and spiritually impregnated future, this drama of the gradual transmutation of intellect into spirit, of son of man into son of God, is the goal of history. When death is overcome, when time is conquered, the kingdom of the eternal spirit is established." History for him "is not a cyclic movement" for "it is full of new things, because God works in it and reveals Himself in it. The end of the time process is the triumph of the World-Spirit, or to use the phrases of Greek classical thought, the triumph of *Nous* over chaos." He does not think that human beings are "puppets moved hither and thither by the blind impersonal necessity of omnipotent matter or the sovereignty of divine providence" for there is "freedom of the will possessed by self-conscious individuals" which through its community with the Eternal can remake the environment.⁵³ We have referred earlier to the view that history is essentially the chronicle of Nara becoming Narottama and finally merging into Narayan and Radhakrishnan's view of history comes very close to it. Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, therefore, take up where ancient India left off and work out the spiritual view of history as developed by ancient Indian thinkers through the *Vedas*, epics, *Dharmashastras* and philosophy into a consistent, logical, and imperative philosophy of history.

At the other end stand the Marxists. D.P. Mukherji has

examined the necessity and validity of applying Marxist premises to an interpretation of Indian history and indicated that without being dogmatic about all that Marxism has to say in its interpretation of human history there is much that is worth applying to an understanding of the history of India. S.A. Dange has attempted a wholly orthodox Marxist interpretation of Indian history in his *India from Primitive Communism to Slavery*. D.D. Kosambi's *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* is a much more sophisticated, critical and scholarly analysis of Indian history along generally Marxist lines. He states that his approach "implies a definite theory of history known as dialectical materialism, also called Marxism after its founder". He insists that his adoption of Marx's thesis "does not mean blind repetition of all his conclusions (and even less, those of the official, party-line Marxists) at all times". He finds it difficult to "handle such imponderables as certain of my countrymen think necessary for the historian; the Indian soul, race memory, the victory of ideals, the innate glory of the four-caste system, and so on." For him what is important is the type of property relations and surplus produced and who took away that surplus. He analyses dynastic changes and religious upheavals as results of powerful changes in the productive basis.⁵⁴ The result is a fascinating, though somewhat far-fetched and unconvincing interpretation of Indian history from an altogether new angle of vision.

Between the spiritualists and the Marxists stands Jawaharlal Nehru who views the chronicle of Indian history in personal and somewhat "romantic" and idealized terms in his *Discovery of India* and his *Autobiography*. Nehru began as a Marxist and was too conscious of the poverty of the country and the misery of its masses to speak very glowingly of spirituality but has nonetheless shown an awareness of the spirit of Indian history which would be regarded critically as an "imponderable" by a Marxist historian like Kosambi. K.M. Panikkar has attempted to interpret Indian history in terms of "the pressure exercised on great civilizations by the nomads of the vacant spaces" and expansions of culture from the marginal lands. He finds the geographical approach interesting but vitiated by obvious defects. He, therefore, examines Indian history from many points and draws the conclusion that there have been existing two Indias—Aryavarta and the Deccan

⁵⁴ *Op., Cit.*, pp. 8-14

--over long periods of time, that communications of a modern kind have revolutionized the pattern of recent Indian history and that the emergence of new factors in Asian and world politics have imposed a revolution of geopolitical considerations in our thinking of the future history of India.⁵⁵ Radha Kumud Mookerji, the eminent Indian historian, has attempted to interpret certain aspects of Indian history in terms of certain dominant ideas such as unity amidst diversity and personalities in his many works.⁵⁶ Similar attempts have been made for different areas of Indian history by scholars like Jadunath Sarkar and R.C. Majumdar.

In sum, the Indian view of history has been essentially spiritual and there is a certain continuity in this view through the ages in all attempts which had for their background an implicit acceptance of the basic concepts of Hindu philosophy. While the claim⁸ of the Marxist approach cannot be dismissed off-hand it has to be stated that it has failed to influence historical thinking in India so far. For the large majority of thinking Indians, therefore, history is neither wholly material nor completely spiritual but rather a two-dimensional unfolding of the interaction between man and the Supreme Spirit. • The central point of the historical awareness is the eternal presence of that entity called *Jambudvipa* or *Bharata-varsha* over the vicissitudes of which brood the spirits of the geniuses like Buddha, Asoka, Samudra Gupta, Akbar, Gandhi and a host of others who have made Indian history what it is guided by the Divine Will watching its creation in a mood of active interest and love. History, again, is much more than a chronicle of wars and revolutions, changes in techniques and relations of production and dynastic and governmental changes. For it is essentially, as the ancient definition points out, a narrative exemplifying the fulfilment of the eternal values of life under the active guidance of a Higher Spirit.

⁵⁵ *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, pp. 5-16, 89-99

⁵⁶ See *Fundamental Unity of India*, pp. 17-22

CHAPTER TWO

DHARMA

I

AN ancient Indian definition of history discussed in the last chapter indicated that history was a narrative of the past exemplifying the fulfilment of the four ideals of life, namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksha. And if there is any one concept that has permeated Indian thinking through the ages and created a consistent pattern of thought and behaviour for the large majority of the people it is that of dharma. The term is of such wide implication that it is applied to a determination and evaluation of all forms of human activity. Sri Aurobindo,¹ the well-known thinker and mystic, points out three characteristics of Indian civilization which we have already discussed earlier. The spirituality, vitality and intellectuality, characteristic of the Indian civilization, stem from the concept of dharma in all its varied aspects. As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan explains, "Under the concept of dharma, the Hindu brings the forms and activities which shape and sustain human life. We have diverse interests, various desires, conflicting needs, which grow and change in the growing. To round them off into a whole is the purpose of dharma. The principle of dharma rouses us to a recognition of spiritual realities not by abstention from the world, but by bringing to its life, its business (artha) and its pleasure (kama), the controlling power of spiritual faith. Life is one and in it there is no distinction of sacred and secular. *Bhakti* and *mukti* are not opposed. Dharma, artha and kama go together."² It is this concept that gives unity to the diversity of human life, its aspirations and human values. Dharma is a comprehensive doctrine of duties and rights of individuals in an ideal society and as such "the law or mirror of all moral action".³

Dharma is literally that which holds "a thing together, makes it what it is, prevents it from breaking up and changing into some-

¹ See U.N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p. 256

² *Religion and Society*, pp. 105-106

³ See Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. 41

thing else, its characteristic function, its peculiar property, its fundamental attribute, its essential nature, is its dharma, the law of its being, primarily."⁴ Among its meanings we may list human duty, family duty, social duty, spiritual duty, cultural duty and political duty. Primarily dharma, then, would mean a corpus of duties essential for the sound organization of human societies. But dharma means more than just a code of duties for it is also understood as a mystic force capable of rewarding and punishing human beings through its mysterious workings. Before we go into a detailed analysis of its diverse implications let us examine briefly its etymology and history through the formative periods of the Indian tradition.

The term dharma is derived from the root *dhri* which mean to sustain, uphold, hold together. Its predecessor seems to be the early Vedic concept of *rita* which the Indo-Aryans brought with them into their new homeland in the region of the seven rivers.⁵ Rita is cosmic order and with its opposite *anrita* "expresses also moral order", it forbids and also commands positive action wherein it assumes the form of something more than mere truth, *satya*.⁶ Rita is a cosmic force and to its laws even the gods are subject. Rita and *yajnya* are the twin concepts which run like warp and woof through the whole fabric of early Indian social and moral thought. Rita means as much the physical order of the universe, as the due order of sacrifice and the moral law in the world.⁷ Keith points out that the idea of rita "is one which, like the moral elevation of Varuna, has no future history in India, pointing irresistibly to the view that it was not an Indian creation, but an inheritance which did not long survive its new milieu."⁸ Rita, however, did not entirely disappear for it was transformed into the concept of dharma which held such decisive sway over Indian thinking through the ages. Alongside of rita the idea of dharma also evolves in the Vedic literature. Dharma then comes to mean custom,⁹ moral laws,¹⁰ laws or duties in general,¹¹ what is right,¹² etc. In the *Brahmanas* the concept of dharma largely

⁴ Bhagwan Das, *The Science of Social Organization*, I, pp. 49-50

⁵ See H.N. Sinha, *Sovereignty in Ancient Indian Polity*, p. 3

⁶ A. Berridale Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, I, pp. 248-9

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35

⁹ *Rig Veda*, iii, 17, 1, 10

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vii, 89, 5, 11

¹¹ *Ibid.*, x, 56, 3, 12

¹² *Ibid.*, viii, 98, 1

supercedes the old concept of rita and for obvious reasons. As the complexity of social organization increased the old concept of rita was found to be inadequate whereas the concept of dharma was able to answer practically all the needs of the evolving situation.¹³ Dharma, then, gradually emerges as a code of duties towards gods, sages, manes, men and the lower orders of creation.¹⁴ Panini, the celebrated Sanskrit grammarian of the 5th century B.C., interprets dharma as an act of religious merit and custom or usage.¹⁵ The *Dharmashastras* further elaborate the concept as the "sum total of the distinctive duties of the constituent units of the social system comprising the four castes (*varnas*) and the four orders (*ashramas*)" giving it a social basis in the task of creating basic principles of a cohesive social order.¹⁶ From this point onward it was only necessary to apply the concept to the totality of human actions and transform it into a comprehensive philosophy of life. Thus it came to mean "morally proper, ethical duty, virtue, good works, religious duty, religious virtue, ideal, Absolute Truth, universal law or principle, divine justice, convention, code of customs and traditions, canon law or law, intertribal law."¹⁷ In this wise dharma meant not only the ethical norm, a religious duty, a mystical entity and an ideal but also implied economic, political, racial and professional rules of conduct, becoming both "the process and the instrument of integration that underlies all modes of association".¹⁸ The *Mahabharata* describes it as being ordained for the advancement and growth of all creatures, "for restricting creatures from injuring one another" and to uphold all creatures. It is not "simple" and unitary, but manifold and "complex" and relates to the behaviour of the state and its subjects, castes and families, groups and orders of life, charity and expediency, salvation, duties of men and women and duties of human beings in general.¹⁹ But behind this manifold encrustation of ideas and concepts, belonging to diverse stages in the development of Indian thinking, lies the basic assumption associated with dharma which may be expressed as "a belief in

¹³ Keith, *op. cit.*, II, p. 479

¹⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 131

¹⁵ V. S. Agarwala, *India as Known to Panini*, p. 146

¹⁶ U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, p. 43

¹⁷ Gualtherus H. Mees, *Dharma and Society*, pp. 8-9

¹⁸ Kewal Motwani, *Manu Dharma Sastra*, p. 24

¹⁹ V. S. Sukthankar, *Meaning of the Mahabharata*, pp. 81-2

the conservation of moral values" indicated by Harold Hoeffling as the definition of religion. "Dharma, in other words, presupposes an eternal moral order which is based on cosmic archetypal ideation, which persists immutably and which is utterly independent of and indifferent to merely human preferences, conveniences or manipulations."²⁰

Such, then, is the majesty of dharma. It gives meaning to human endeavour and in its all-pervasive spirit, it regulates all forms of human activity whether social or individual, moral or metaphysical, rational or mystical, mundane or spiritual. Its very comprehensiveness made it the central point in Indian thinking through the ages and in its various ordinances human beings found a significance which transformed mere existence into living inspired by immutable ideals. That it was not just a theoretical exposition, interesting and valid only to digest-writers and moralists, metaphysicians and logicians, is indicated by its expression as much in the actions of mythical and historical figures like Dilipa, Bharata, Rama and Yudhisthira, Asoka, Samudra Gupta, Harsha and Akbar, as in the thoughts and deeds of ordinary men and women who sought in it an inspiration to striving and comfort in moments of crisis. Let us now turn to an analysis of this concept in all its implications in the diverse aspects of human life.

Though dharma as a mystical category is eternal and immutable, it makes itself manifest in the affairs of humanity as originating from some well-recognized sources. Manu, the great law-giver, describes the *Vēdas*, *Smritis*, character, conduct of virtuous people and reason as the sources of dharma.²¹ Yajnyavalkya and other *smriti* writers give a similar list of sources²² and the *Mahabharata* lists truth, wholesome custom and applicability (*upaya*) as sources of dharma.²³ Dharma, thus, is not merely tradition or custom but also truth and reason, for if tradition is in conflict with truth or reason then it can scarcely be called dharma. In this there is an obvious effort to stress the importance of reason as a factor in the proper ordering of human affairs but this reason must be firmly associated with the demands of truth and morality so that

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80

²¹ *Manavadharmashastra*, II, 6

²² *Yajnyavalkyasmriti*, II, 1, 1-36-9

²³ *Mahabharata*, XII, 101, 2-5

it may not degenerate into mere casuistry. It is this combination of the mystical with the rational and metaphysical and the severely practical that explains the vitality of the concept through the ages.

Dharma began as a code of human behaviour and developed into a mystical entity subjected as it was to a long process of rationalization and categorization. The *Upanishads* speak of it as the foundation of the whole universe for through it one drives away evil; on it everything is founded and hence it is called the highest good.²⁴ In another place it is stated that He (the Brahman) "was not strong enough; he created still further the most excellent dharma; dharma is the kshatra of kshatra; therefore, there is nothing higher than dharma; thenceforth even a weak man rules the stronger with the help of dharma as with the help of a king; thus the dharma is called the true; and if a man declares what is True, they say he declares the dharma; and if he declares the dharma, they say he declares what is true; thus both are the same."²⁵ Kautilya calls dharma the eternal truth holding its sway over the world²⁶ and the *Mahabharata* defines it in terms of its capacity for the sustenance of the world.²⁷ The *Ramayana* indicates dharma as a source of profit and pleasure, the essence and strength of the world.²⁸ If karma binds, dharma liberates implying as it does an element of divine grace²⁹ for, it is the "divine moral order by which the social structure is knit together."³⁰ As a mystic force it is the underlying principle in the social evolution of humanity towards the manifestation and demonstration of the unity and oneness of mankind as being subject to the ordinances of dharma. It is not simple morality, though it tends to appear as such in certain contexts for, morality is based on inherent worth whereas dharma is based on Revelation signifying divine intervention in the affairs of mankind. As the Buddhists put it, it is dharma which makes the difference between good and evil; dharma is the ruler of rulers, the highest in the world.³¹ Dharma it is, that infuses an element of morality into the brute force wielded by the state and it also bases economic

²⁴ *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, 10; 79

²⁵ *Brihadaranyakopanishad*, I, 4, 11-15 ²⁶ *Arthashastra*, III, 1

²⁷ *Mahabharata*, XII, 110; 10-11 ²⁸ *Ramayana*, III, 9, 30

²⁹ See Mees, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20 ³⁰ Zimmer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 152

³¹ *Anguttara Nikaya*, III, p. 149, *Digha Nikaya*, III, p. 95.

and social relations between men and societies on the ground of moral and spiritual values.

For dharma though understood severally is universal as *manava-dharma*, the dharma of all beings irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed, colour and wealth, status and inclination. As an urge within oneself to do aught that is right and proper dharma it is "which makes man seek for happiness in this world and the next. Dharma is established on work; dharma is impelling man day and night to run after and work for happiness."³² It is action and not a flight from reality and it binds man inexorably to what he must become ultimately in obedience to the laws of his inner being. In its universal aspect dharma means "contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, (obedience to the rules of) purification, disciplining of the organs, wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness and abstention from anger."³³ In the *Vishnudharmashastra* the dharma common to all human beings is described as "forbearance, veracity, restraint, self-control, not to kill (any living being), obedience towards one's *Gurus* (preceptors), visiting places of pilgrimage, sympathy (with the afflicted), straightforwardness, freedom from covetousness, reverence towards gods and Brahmanas and freedom from anger."³⁴ The *Bhagavata Purana* defines manavadharma as "harmlessness, truthfulness, absence of the tendency to steal, to be free from the passions of desire, anger and covetousness, activity in the direction of what is agreeable and good to beings."³⁵ Kautilya includes harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, freedom from spite, abstinence from cruelty and forgiveness as the essential constituents of the dharma of all human beings.³⁶ The *Mahabharata* describes non-violence as the highest dharma³⁷ while the *Bhagavadgita* points out "rightness" as the essence of dharma.³⁸ In another place custom is defined as transcendental dharma³⁹; it is also spoken of as social duty⁴⁰ or ritual duty.⁴¹ In short dharma in its universal aspects is the embodiment of truth and non-violence, self-restraint and compassion in our everyday life and

³² Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, V, p. 349

³³ *Manavadharmashastra*, VI, 92 ³⁴ *Vishnudharmashastra*, II

³⁵ *Bhagavata Purana*, XI, 17; 21

³⁶ *Arthashastra*, (Translated by Shamasastri), p. 7

³⁷ *Mahabharata*, XII, 110, 10-11 ³⁸ *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 7

³⁹ *Manavadharmashastra*, I 108-10 ⁴⁰ *Digha Nikaya*, III, pp. 84-95

⁴¹ See Max Weber, *The Religions of India*, p. 24

it is the instrument for remoulding our nature¹ and sublimating our instincts.

The social aspects of the concept of dharma are seen in the operation of the institution of varna. Caste is a unique social institution in many ways. Caste is based on hereditary membership and controls occupations, use of food and drink, marriage and social intercourse and in many cases has forms of social control designed to enforce compliance with the rules and regulations of the institution. When the Aryans first came into India there emerged the first division based on race. The invading group called itself the *Arya varna* as being characterized by a fair complexion, worship of nature-gods through the instrumentality of Brahmanical sacrifices and the use of the Sanskrit language. As against the Aryans there was the group of non-Aryans who are described as having a dark complexion, not following the Vedic religion and speaking a different language. This was the genesis of the varna system and though race as a basis of social division soon became unimportant the concept continued as a kind of a sociological fiction. Varna then came to mean broad occupational and status divisions and it is in this sense that the epics, law-books and *Puranas* speak of varna. The varnas are described as four in number namely, the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra or the priestly order, the military order, the agricultural-commercial-artisan order and the servile order. Within the primitive Aryan society there was going on an occupational specialization and differentiation already noticeable in the Vedic period itself. This differentiation related to occupational complexities and the priestly order was probably the first to display it due to the growth of the sacrificial ritual necessitating a long period of priestly training for it. There was also the tendency of the military order to differentiate itself from the rest and those who were neither priests nor soldier-administrators were the common people, the Vaishyas, engaged in all the productive arts and professions. However, the Aryans began to intermingle with the non-Aryans many of whom were taken as captives in war. To these were given the more menial tasks involving physical and often unclean work and in course of time there arose the equation between type of work and social status associated with it. There then emerged the servile order, the Shudra, who was described as the servant of another. As the population spread over the land

each group came to acquire characteristics of a regional nature which split the castes into many more. Again there was going on the assimilation of numerous tribal and social groups at different levels of cultural attainment and this added to the number and complexity of the system. To these were added ritual and sectarian differences and these also helped in the proliferation of the caste system. The Purushasukta of the *Rig Veda* contains a description of the rise of the four major castes from the different parts of the Cosmic Man indicating thereby the rise of theories giving the system a divine sanction. Since, it was argued, the institution is divinely ordained, its duties—dharma—are also laid down by the gods and must not be disregarded. This theory, of course, was not accepted without protest and Buddhism and Jainism were the strongest protests lodged against such a social division. But already in the 5th century B.C. varna had come to mean caste.⁴² Kautilya describes the duties of the four castes as follows: (a) Brahmana: study, teaching, performance of sacrifices, officiating at sacrifices and giving and receiving gifts; (b) Kshatriya: study, performance of sacrifices, giving gifts, military occupations and protection of the life and property of others; (c) Vaishya: study, performance of sacrifices, giving gifts, agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade; (d) Shudra: serving the twice-born, agriculture, cattle-breeding, trade, profession of artisans and court-bards.⁴³ Two points need some comment here. One is the use of the term twice-born. It refers to the sacrament of investiture with the sacred thread (*upanayana*) which was denied to the Shudra and regarded as obligatory for the others. This meant that the Shudra was always regarded as ritually impure since only with the performance of the sacrament could an individual claim the right to study the sacred lore. The second point is the close similarity in the professions regarded as legitimate for the Vaishya and the Shudra. This similarity clearly indicates the fact that the acceptance of the Shudra group as a constituent of Aryan society meant a certain elevation in its status which led to a subsidence in the status of the Vaishya since the line dividing the Vaishya from the Shudra on occupational grounds was rendered very thin indeed. The real difference between the Vaishya and the Shudra, then, lay in the ritual impurity of the latter. Manu, Vishnu and other law-givers repeat this traditional division of labour which

⁴² Agarwala, *op. cit.*, p. 75

⁴³ *Arthashastra*, p. 7

formed one of the bases of the caste system and the *Gita* attempts to rationalize it and invest it with a spiritual significance. Krishna says in the *Gita* that He had created the four-fold division of varnas based on differences of opportunity (karma) and ability (*gunā*).⁴⁴ The *Gita* also insists on each order performing its own specific duties which constitute its dharma in the following words: "Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well-performed; better is death in the discharge of one's duties; another's duty is fraught with danger."⁴⁵ S. Radhakrishnan brings out the significance of this theory stating that the main emphasis in it is "on *guna* (aptitude) and *karma* (function) and not *jati* (birth). The *varna* or order to which we belong is independent of sex, birth or breeding. A class determined by temperament and vocation is not a caste determined by birth and heredity. According to the *Mahabharata*, the whole world was originally of one class but later it became divided into four divisions on account of the specific duties. Even the distinction between caste and outcaste is artificial and unspiritual. . . . The fourfold order is designed for human evolution. There is nothing absolute about the caste system which has changed its character in the process of history. Today it cannot be regarded as anything more than an insistence on a variety of ways in which the social purpose can be carried out. Functional groupings will never be out of date and as for marriages they will happen among those who belong to more or less the same stage of cultural development.' The present morbid condition of India is opposed to the unity taught by the *Gita* which stands for an organic as against an atomistic conception of society."⁴⁶ Mahatma Gandhi has the following comments to offer on the stanza quoted above: "One man's duty may be to serve the community as a sweeper, another's may be to work as an accountant. . . . Before God the work of man will be judged by the spirit in which it is done, not by the nature of the work which makes no difference whatsoever. Whoever acts in a spirit of dedication fits himself for salvation."⁴⁷ It is often remarked that the *Gita* tried to work out a philosophy for a system which was basically inequitable and thus with its

⁴⁴ *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 13

⁴⁵ Mahadev Desai, *The Gospel of Selfless Action*, p. 188

⁴⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, pp. 160-61

⁴⁷ Mahadev Desai, *Op. Cit.*, p. 188

tremendous prestige made the system permanent. But it must be realized that by the time the *Gita* came on the scene (*circa* 200 B.C.) the system had already emerged in its basic form and it only remained for the later ages to work out all its logical conclusions. What the *Gita* does, then, is to attempt to keep the system open and flexible and imparting to it a spirit of liberalism by infusing into it the principles of potentiality (as represented by karma) and ability (guna) with which at least a minimal possibility of upward and downward movement was theoretically kept open. As Radhakrishnan⁴⁸ states the institution of caste had a historical validity in the situation in which it rose. It was an attempt at eliminating conflict, racial, economic and social, consequent upon the assimilation of various occupational, tribal and cultural groups within the structure of Hindu society from time to time.

The varna system thus came to be the basis of Hindu social organization and the concept of dharma naturally related itself to it in some of its social aspects. The *Arthashastra* and the *Dharmashastras* call upon the state to enforce the duties of the various castes as a major part of its social and economic functions.⁴⁹ *Varnadharma*, in such a context, came to mean the predetermined duties of citizens and members of the various social orders sharply defining the legitimate from the objectionable. This had far-reaching social and economic consequences in the history of the country. "Institutions" says Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "may be defined as means to the perfectibility of the individual. They are to be judged accordingly by the standard of whatever are held to be the immediate and ultimate ends of life; as good if they conduce to their realization . . ."⁵⁰ The varnas and castes arose in answer to certain persistent social and economic needs. As Radha Kamal Mukerji states, "the distinctive ancient Indian institution of caste had its genesis in practical social convenience and self-management of congeries of peoples of different stocks and stages of civilization who had to live together in close contiguity and co-operation in the village communities of the expansive river basins."⁵¹ The system had its

⁴⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, *Hindu View of Life*, pp. 93ff

⁴⁹ *Vishnudharmashastra*, III, 3

⁵⁰ *East and West and Other Essays*, p. 17

⁵¹ *A History of Indian Civilization*, I, p. 8

own historical and economic justification as it answered the needs of a "plural" society living on a subsistence economy marked by primitive techniques of production and paucity of metals and other materials necessary for the successive phases of economic development. For instance, it helped in working out a *modus operandi* for the assimilation of different tribal and cultural groups within the structure of the larger society without introducing elements of social and economic tensions and conflicts. It helped the development of the integration of a "plural" society by rigidly defining the social, economic and cultural functions of each of its constituent groups and reinforcing the code of their duties through social and religious sanctions against disobedience. On the other hand, much of the imbalance in Indian society must be explained in terms of the penalties of the Varna or caste system for securing social peace and economic stability for the country through the ages. For where the caste gave elements of stability it also imposed conditions of stagnation for the society of which it became the basis. As Radhakrishnan has stated caste "degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance" and tended "to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness".⁵² Especially in its aspect of sub-castes the system divided the "Hindu people into such small units as to render the development of any common social feeling impossible. In fact it is a negation of the idea of society."⁵³ Max Weber observes that "the relatively low social status and correspondingly low standard of living of the Hindu masses has, to some extent, religious causes" and among these the system of castes may be mentioned as one.⁵⁴ In the political context "the admitted failure of the people to act concertedly in political affairs instead of being an outgrowth of caste rigidity during the Gupta and post-Gupta times, was inherent in the ancient Smriti conception of the duties of the caste (Varna-dharma) which normally confined the functions of ruling and fighting to the kshatriyas alone."⁵⁵ Gandhiji, however, vigorously defended the varna system in the following words: "I believe that just as everyone inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to

⁵² S. Radhakrishnan, *Hindu View of Life*, p. 93

⁵³ K.M. Panikkar, *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, p. 13

⁵⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 5

⁵⁵ U. N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p. 297

make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank admission if he will act upon it would put a legitimate curb upon our ambitions and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is the doctrine of *Varnashramadharma* which I have always adopted.⁵⁶ He regarded it as a healthy division of work based on birth and stated that the present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original intention. "There is no question with me" he said "of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty."⁵⁷ As a gospel of social duty stated in ideal terms as Gandhiji has done, the system may have had its own justification and merits but it must be observed that the reality was far different from the ideally stated position. Secondly the caste system always made for a fragmented society based on a stagnant economy and Gandhi's acceptance of the varna system of social duties must be understood in the context of his insistence on the superiority of an economy of subsistence over that of abundance. Gandhian economics is based on the postulates of minimum needs satisfied through primitive and stratified patterns of production and productive relations which have been a characteristic of Indian economic history. D.D. Kosambi, the Marxist historian, points out that it was only with the triumph of the village as a unit of social and political organization and economic production and the triumph of rusticity that the caste system became rigid. The stagnant economy created its own social complex which was the varna and caste system which in its turn helped preserve the stagnating economy.⁵⁸ The varna system of duties no doubt helped create and preserve a system of balance of social forces whereby the Brahmana had the monopoly of sacerdotal power without any military or economic power, the Kshatriya had the sole prerogative of bearing arms and thus possessed military and political power but he had neither the sacerdotal power of the Brahmana nor the economic power of the Vaishya; the Vaishya possessed economic power without the slightest share in the sacerdotal power of the Brahmana and the military and political power of the Kshatriya. This made for a certain co-operation between the various orders imperative for successful or satisfactory social functioning. The concept of *varnadharma*, in the balance, however, helped perpetuate obsolete

⁵⁶ *Young India*, 29-9-27

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-4-25

⁵⁸ *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 243

forms of social and economic organizations which were largely responsible for the absence of movements leading to the rise of capitalism or nationalism. The varnadharma expressed a pyramidal society with each layer fixed and immovable thus making social revolution virtually impossible.

Closely associated with varnadharma, in fact standing as a corollary of it, is the concept of ashramadharma. The ashrama system aims at a schematic division of life into four stages. The term is derived from the root *shrama*, to exert oneself. Consequently it means both the place where one exerts oneself and also the mode of exertion. The term, therefore, signifies a stage in the journey of life. The scheme of the four stages of life evolved gradually in answer to certain ritual, social and spiritual needs. The earliest texts mention only the first three namely *Brahmacharya* (studentship), *Grihastha* (householder) and *Vanaprastha* (hermit) and it is possible that the fourth and the last, *Sannyasa* (complete renunciation) came to be fitted into the general scheme of life at a later stage. Superficially viewed the third and fourth appear alike but the renunciation is more complete in the last, and the ceremonies initiating it also appear to imply a total break not only with family but also with society. It is insisted upon that normally a man should pass through all the four stages in the order in which they are listed. As a man has to fulfil certain obligations and duties towards his own self and towards society, it is necessary that he should do so at the proper time and in the proper manner. These duties are called the *rinās* or debts which are three in number: the debt to the *rishis* or sages; the debt due to one's ancestors (*pitris*) and the debt due to the gods (*devas*). These debts are properly discharged by a study of the Scriptures during the period of Brahmacharya, by raising a family during Grihastashrama and by offering sacrifices according to one's capacity during one's life as a hermit (Vanaprastha). Only after the fulfilment of these obligations should one think of moksha or liberation from Samsara (existence) which is the aim of complete renunciation or Sannyasa.

The Brahmacharya or studentship, commenced after Upanayana (ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread performed any time during the 8th and 12th year). After this the child became a student and dwelt in the house of a teacher, living a life of poverty and purity and devoting himself to a study of his religion

and other subjects. This took twelve years at the end of which came the ceremony of *samavartana* (student's return home). Then he married and lived as a householder until his hair turned gray and wrinkles appeared on the skin when he entered upon the stage of a hermit. He left home and lived in a hermitage in the forests along with his wife, leading a life of few wants, receiving alms, offering sacrifices, studying the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. Later, if he was so inclined, he became a *Sannyasin* when he lived alone and homeless, in quest of salvation.

These four ashramas indicate a view of life that is of great significance in our understanding of the spirit of life in India. They are based on the supposition that all life is a preparation for salvation, and hence, must be properly organized both for individual and social welfare. They are so designed as to facilitate the realization of the four ideals of life namely, dharma, artha (economic welfare), kama (biological and cultural fulfilment) and moksha (salvation). In the first phase a man is expected to learn all about the spiritual and cultural traditions of his people by which the continuity of the cultural tradition is ensured through education of the young. During the second stage the economic, biological and cultural demands of society and life are met. In the third stage he is expected to rise above mundane interests and in the fourth he actively strives for the realization of the supreme end of all life, salvation. The ashramas, aimed at the fullest development of the individual and the social group in which he lived and of which he was a part. The two traditions which they subserve are those of dharma (social preservation and growth) and yajnya (the moulding of human personality in such a manner as to eliminate friction and aid individual development through the spirit of sacrifice). During the first stage society is called upon to receive and educate the individual in his cultural heritage; in the second, he is expected to fulfil his obligations to society by playing his proper economic and social role; the third stage becomes an experience in contemplative and reflective enrichment and the last is spent in search of the Infinite. The first, is, therefore, the stage of man learning, the second of man acting, the third of man contemplating and the last of man realizing. By regulating the growth of the human personality and fixing the obligations of the individual towards his society and *vice versa* the ashramas significantly contributed to the continuance

and enrichment of the cultural traditions of the country by preserving stability of life without arresting individual and spiritual progress.

These ashramas were introduced or more correctly "formulated" during the *Brahmana* age⁵⁹ and were already a familiar institution during the time of Panini (5th century B.C.).⁶⁰ Kautilya and the *Dharmashastras* lay down elaborate rules about the dharma of the ashramas.⁶¹ Theoretically they were meant to be observed by the first three orders of society though it is doubtful if the practice of their strict observance ever extended on any significant scale, to castes other than the Brahmanas. In the case of the Brahmanas too only a small number may have rigidly followed the rules in all the details and complexity and only a very small section must have gone on to the third and fourth stages after the Upanishadic age. But the life of the householder was obviously influenced by the concept of the dharma of the varnas and ashramas through the ages as is indicated by notices of conditions in the country in the inscriptions and historical records and observations of foreign travellers.

These ideas of dharma relating to social groupings and a schematic division of individual life were major factors affecting the social and spiritual evolution of India. We have seen that in the first three centuries before Christ the concept of dharma was not only being worked out in all its implications but was also a factor of influence in the life of the people. Kautilya's book is based on reality and though the *Dharmashastras* often state positions in ideal terms there is not much doubt that when they speak of the concept of dharma they are referring to what must have been a well-accepted and recognized reality. Though the occupational rigidity associated with the idea of varnadharma had not influenced actual conditions even until the time of the Imperial Guptas⁶² the trend in the direction of such rigidity was obvious. The officers called the *Vinayasthitisthapakas* (morality officers), under the Imperial Gupta administration, were responsible for the maintenance of dharma which was understood in the traditional

⁵⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 132

⁶⁰ Agarwala, *op. cit.*; p. 81

⁶¹ *Arthashastra*, p. 47; *Vishnudharmashastra*, XXVIII-XXXIII; LVIII-LXX; XCIV- XCV; XCVI

⁶² See *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Ed by Fleet, J.), III, p. 119

context of what was laid down in the smritis as also in the larger context of morality and spiritual welfare in general.⁶³ For the earlier Maurya age we have interesting testimony from the observations of Megasthenes, the Greek envoy at the court of Chandragupta Maurya (324-299 B.C.). Megasthenes says that the population of India was divided into seven parts namely; (a) philosophers, (b) husbandmen, (c) herdsmen and hunters, (d) traders and labourers, (e) fighting men, (f) overseers and (g) councillors. In this Megasthenes has evidently confused between caste and purely functional groups but it is not difficult to see that he is referring to the general prevalence of the fourfold varna structure each with its own distinctive dharma.⁶⁴ This basic pattern persisted through the ages and in the early Muslim period (A.D. 1000-1300) the picture is practically the same as in the early smriti writings.⁶⁵

The foreign travellers who compiled notices of conditions in the country from time to time have shown that the concept of varna, and to a certain extent, ashrama dharma had practical bearings on the life of the people at large. Hiuen Tsiang, who toured India in the 7th century A.D. observes: "With respect to divisions of families, there are four classifications. The first is called the Brahmana, men of pure conduct. They guard themselves with religion, live purely, and observe the most correct principles. The second is called Kshatriya, the royal caste. For ages they have been the governing class; they apply themselves to virtue (humanity) and kindness. The third is called Vaishyas, the merchant class; they engage in commercial exchange, and they follow profit at home and abroad. The fourth is called Shudra, the agricultural class; they labour in ploughing and tillage. In these four classes purity or impurity of castes assigns to everyone his place. When they marry they rise or fall in position according to their new relationships. They do not allow promiscuous marriages between relations. A woman once married can never take another husband. Besides these there are other classes of many kinds

⁶³ R. C. Majumdar, and A. S. Altekar, (Eds.), *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, The Vakataka-Gupta Age, p. 279

⁶⁴ J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, pp. 83-6

⁶⁵ R.C. Majumdar, and A.D. Pusalkar, (Eds.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, V, The Struggle for Empire, pp. 474-476

that intermarry according to their several callings.”⁶⁶ That these conditions of the 7th century A.D. were not much changed seven hundred years later is indicated by references to the system of castes by the Moorish traveller Ibn Batuta.⁶⁷ Some three hundred years later came Tavernier whose observations were strikingly similar to those of Ibn Batuta.⁶⁸ And the same story is told by Bernier who visited India during the time of Aurangzeb (seventies of the 17th century).⁶⁹ Later the French missionary Abbe Dubois, who lived in India during 1792-1823, describes similar conditions in the opening decades of the 19th century. He says: “This strict and universal observance of caste and caste usages forms practically their whole social law. A very great number of people are to be found amongst them, to whom death would appear far more desirable than life, if for example, the latter were sustained by eating cow’s flesh or any food prepared by Pariahs and outcastes.” And then he goes on to explain why the dharma and castes and ashramas had such a hold by saying “After much careful thought I can discover no other reason except caste which accounts for the Hindus not having fallen into the same state of barbarism as their neighbours and as almost all nations inhabiting the torrid zone. Caste assigns to each individual his own profession or calling; and the handing down of the system from father to son, from generation to generation, makes it impossible for any person or his descendants to change the condition of life which the law assigns to him for any other. Such an institution was probably the only means that the most clear sighted prudence could devise for maintaining a state of civilization amongst a people endowed with the peculiar characteristics of the Hindus.”⁷⁰

Besides the varna and ashrama the concept of dharma also regulated behaviour in the family. This *kuladharma* meant a set of filial and ritual duties and its object was the general fulfilment of the four ideals of life described at the beginning of this chapter.

⁶⁶ Samuel Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, p. 82

⁶⁷ H.A.R. Gibb, *Ibn Batuta, Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, p. 228

⁶⁸ William Crooke, (Ed), *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, II, pp. 142-144

⁶⁹ Irving Brock, (Ed), *Travels in the Mogul Empire by Francis Bernier*, II, p. 32

⁷⁰ Henry K. Beauchamp, (Ed), *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies by the Abbe J.A. Dubois*, pp. 29, 41, 14-15, 160

In the matter of filial relations kuladharmā meant the proper conduct of the different members of the family towards each other whereas in ritual matters it indicated the performance of the "five great sacrifices" which enabled the householder to expiate possible sins committed through the use of the hearth, grinding-stone, broom, pestle and mortar and the water-vessel.⁷¹ Such sins may arise out of violence to living beings in the course of preparation of food or consumption of ritually impure food. The five great sacrifices are offered to the memory of the sages of the past and embodied in teaching and study (*b,ahmayajnya*), sacrifice to the spirits of the ancestors (*pitriyajnya*), offerings to spirits (*bhuta-yajnya*), hospitality to guests and strangers (*atithiyajnya*) and sacrifice for the sake of humanity (*nriyajnya*).⁷² It is this kuladharmā which is the basis of the psychology of spiritual continuity in the life of the family and thus becomes a means of familial integration for the people.

Of rules regulating relations between father and son, mother and daughter, husband and wife, senior and junior, there is a mass of literature. The Buddha, in one of his sermons, has given us an interesting picture of this code of behaviour in the family. The duties of a householder, according to the Buddha, are as follows: (a) he should avoid destruction of life, taking what is not given, licentiousness and untruth; (b) he should eschew motives of partiality, enmity, stupidity and fear in his dealings with others; (c) he should avoid dissipation of wealth through drinking intoxicating drinks, frequenting the streets at unseemly hours, going to fairs, gambling, evil companions and idleness; (d) he should avoid associating with the rapacious, men of words not deeds, flatterers and fellow-wasters; (e) he should respect his parents, teachers and elders.⁷³ Indeed, respect for parents and obedience to their commands was often insisted upon as the highest duty of children.⁷⁴ In his relations towards his wife a man was exhorted not to outstep the bounds of dharma, artha and kama⁷⁵ and there was a general insistence of mutual regard and respect among the different members of the family as the essence of kuladharmā.

⁷¹ *Manavdharmashastra*, iii, 67

⁷² *Ibid.*, iii, 68-69

⁷³ Rhys Davids (Trans), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, III, pp. 173-4

⁷⁴ *Mahabharata*, Shantiparva, 272, 15; *Manavdharmashastra*, ii, 145

⁷⁵ Pandhari Nath Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 165

Then there are the *kala* (time) and *desha* (region, place) which are also related to the concept of dharma. Age and region would largely influence men's conduct for, as explained by Bhishma in the *Mahabharata*, what is dharma in one place may not be dharma in another.⁷⁶ The recognition of the role of time and region in the formation of dharma is an indication of an awareness that the concept of dharma was no rigid concept but a flexible, modifiable and dynamic principle related to the exigencies of time, place and human needs.⁷⁷ The code of *kala* and *desha* dharma demanded of man a discriminating compliance with customs and usages of the time and place in the context of which his life is lived in the world. Custom is also regarded as a source of law by the Hindu law-makers and one school of thought adopted the position that where custom or usage is in conflict with the Sacred Canon usage should prevail.⁷⁸ Each period of time, it is recognized, has its own norms of behaviour and judgement and its own distinct set of values and this *yugadharma* changes according to the cultural quality of the age. The norms of the hypothetical *satyayuga* cannot be practicable for the *kaliyuga* when there is a general decline in standards. This does not mean that what is truth becomes untruth or that what is absolutely good becomes relatively bad. There is a general unanimity in the postulation of certain perennially and absolutely valid norms which are the basis of ethics. What the concepts of *kala* and *desha* imply is that given the difference in outlooks and attitudes of different periods and climes the details of a scheme of human conduct cannot be the same at all times and in all places. This prevented the concept of dharma from becoming a stratified idea by leaving the possibility open for change in its institutionalized character.

Finally we have dharma as the basis of power. This concept grows in relation to the development of political thought in India. In the *Rig Veda* we have the idea of *vrata* which has the connotation of law.⁷⁹ But there is also the equation of dharma with law.⁸⁰ Dharma is declared as the ruler of rulers; it is the mystic force which enables the king to rule but also destroys a wicked

⁷⁶ *Mahabharata*, Shantiparva, 78, 32 ⁷⁷ Prabhu, *op. cit.*, p. 74

⁷⁸ U. N. Ghosal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, pp. 44-5

⁷⁹ *Rig Veda*, ii, 28, 8; i, 36, 5; x, 65, 11; i, 101, 3

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, iii, 17, 1; v, i, 164; vi, 70, 3; x, 90, 16

ruler bent on violating its ordinances. As Manu says: "Dharma when violated verily destroys; dharma when preserved, preserves, therefore, dharma should not be violated, lest the violated dharma destroy us."⁸² The content of the sovereignty of the state is force (danda) which must be used solely for enforcing the ordinances of dharma. As early as the Vedic times the concept of *rajadharma* or dharma of the state had begun to develop for, maintenance of dharma was considered to be the main function of the Vedic king.⁸³ In the Buddhist literature there is the same insistence on the primacy of dharma over danda and the ideal of the *dhammiko dhammaraja*⁸⁴ is held forth as valid for all ages and places. The *Arthashastra* and the *Dharmashastras* give a detailed exposition of *rajadharma* under which protection of the people and maintenance of the institutions of varna and ashrama are mentioned as the most vital duties of the state.⁸⁵ The *Rajanushasana parva* of the *Mahabharata* is a veritable treasurehouse of ideas on the dharma of the king. Maintenance of existing social institutions as a fundamental duty of the state was an idea which also influenced Muslim thinkers as is indicated by Abul Fazl's inclusion of the protection of the four orders of society in their respective positions in the scheme of royal duties.⁸⁶ It is the duty of the king to defend dharma and enforce its regulations⁸⁷ and the *Arthashastra* declares that "of a king, the religious vow is his readiness of action; satisfactory discharge of duties is his performance of sacrifices, equal attention to all is the offer of fees" and that the ideal king regards the happiness of his subjects as his own happiness which can be realized only through the practice of dharma.⁸⁸ The ideal state, thus, upholds the dharma in all its majesty and multiplicity. The state exists for the protection of the three ideals of dharma, artha and kama⁸⁹ and the concept of dharma was obviously meant as an instrument for infusing a moral content into what otherwise would have been naked and brutal force wielded by the state.

That the state has a pre-eminently moral role to play was

⁸² *Manavadharmashastra*. VIII, 15 ⁸¹ *Bṛīhalaranyakopaniṣad*, I, 4, 26

⁸³ Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 27

⁸⁴ See B.G. Gokhale, (Ed) *Indica*, paper on *Dhammiko Dhammaraja*

⁸⁵ *Arthashastra*, p. 107

⁸⁶ *Ain-i-Akbari*, (Trans. by Blochman), I, v

⁸⁷ *Shatapathabrahmana*, v, 4, 4, 5 ⁸⁸ *Arthashastra*, p. 38

⁸⁹ See A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, pp. 29-31

recognized by the Brahmanical thinkers. The *Vishnudharma-shastra* lays it down that the major duty of the king is to honour the righteous and punish the wicked for which task he is endowed with the power of danda or force.⁹⁰ These thinkers also recognized the importance of the principle of equity when they called upon the king to inflict punishments corresponding to the nature of offences.⁹¹ As Ghoshal points out "the smriti rules and principles relating to the obligation of the temporal ruler toward his subjects partook of the nature of solemn injunctions imposed upon the king by the sacred canon as part and parcel of a comprehensive scheme of duties of the constituent units of the social system, and they were supported as such by the highest moral and spiritual sanctions."⁹² But in actual practice the theory of equal justice often went by the board since the principles of varnadharma always implied a hierarchical scheme of social living and values wherein the lower orders of society could scarcely expect to be treated on the same level as the higher orders. A perusal of the scheme of punishments prescribed for the different orders by Manu and other writers reveals the state of unequal justice and penalties for the different orders of the Hindu society.⁹³ The Shudra was always a second-class citizen under the scheme of varnadharma and the plight of the Shudra as revealed in the law-books constitutes an element of weakness in the otherwise vital structure of rajadharma. But elsewhere too there has always been one law for the freeman and another for the slave; the patrician and the plebeian, the feudal lord and his serf could not expect to be treated as equals in the eyes of the law. Equality of persons before law is a fairly recent practice and we need not be over-critical if the thinkers of ancient India did not anticipate that practice at least a thousand years before people elsewhere thought and acted on that lofty principle. In spite of its shortcomings like the one noted above the concept of dharma profoundly influenced ideas on polity and statecraft by infusing a moral purpose into a system based on coercive force and centralized control as represented by the position of the king in India. Dharma acted as a check on royal absolutism and that this was

⁹⁰ *Vishnudharmashastra*, III, 36, 37 ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 91

⁹² *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p. 292

⁹³ *Manavdharmashastra*, VIII, 270, 366; B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Asoka*, pp. 206-207

as much true in practice as in theory is shown by the conduct of kings like Asoka, Samudra Gupta, Harsha and Akbar.

It was Asoka who was the first historical Indian emperor who attempted the most thoroughgoing application of the concept of dharma to politics. Asoka changed from conquest by force to conquest through morality—*dharmavijaya*—after the Kalinga war (261 B.C.). He devoted his entire life to the increase of morality among the people. This he tried to do by inscribing moral precepts on rocks and pillars throughout his empire. He also appointed a new class of officers called the *dharmamahamatras* or morality officers whose duty it was to work for the furtherance of the aims of dharma among the people. Asoka understood dharma as consisting of good deeds, kindness, liberality, truthfulness and purity, proper behaviour towards elders and religious men, considerate conduct towards dependents and inferiors, intense self-examination, charity and compassion, tolerance and non-violence, equal justice for all and appropriate conduct at all levels of life. He also carried out a number of measures for the furtherance of public works like construction of roads, setting up of rest-houses, digging of wells, establishing of hospitals for men and animals and planting of medicinal plants of use to ailing creatures. He sent out missions to some of the kings of Western Asia to let them know what he was doing and under his patronage Buddhism spread not only all over the country but also outside. He was impartial in his gifts to all religious systems⁹⁴ and in this he upheld the best traditions of kingship in India. Asoka's "inculcation of morality is a sensitive and shrewd combination of inspiration and constraint, of ideal example and administrative sanction."⁹⁵

Samudra Gupta was quite a different personality. He was the mighty conqueror who created an empire out of a small kingdom bequeathed to him by his father, Chandra Gupta I. He followed the precepts of both *dharmavijaya* (righteous conquest) and *asura vijaya* (violent conquest). But he was something more than just a conqueror. His Allahabad Pillar Inscription describes him as a man of great charity and kindness, a patron of learning and the arts, devoted to religious duties and Sacred Scriptures, munificent in his gifts to Brahmanas and the needy, in short a *dharmaraja*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.58-74

⁹⁵ Nikam and McKeon, *The Edicts of Asoka*, p. xv

whose conduct was inspired by the high ideals of dharma.⁹⁶

Harsha (A.D. 606-647), says Hiuen Tsiang, "rewarded the good and punished the wicked, degraded the evil and promoted the men of talent". His day was equally divided between attention to matters of administration and religious devotion and generously supported men of learning and piety. Centuries later the great Akbar also showed in his actions that the ideal of dharma still inspired the conduct of great kings. He was perhaps the first Muslim king to actively pursue the ideal of being a king of and for all his subjects, Muslims and Hindus alike, a policy which was distinctly different from the normal policies of Islamic polity. He set up almshouses throughout his empire and established caravanseries for travellers at every stage where food was to be prepared and held in readiness at all times for the way-worn travellers.⁹⁷ He abolished the Jizia and in his Ibadatkhana listened attentively to discussions on Islam and Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jainism with equal interest. In all these actions he displayed the influence of the concept of rajadharma as understood in India through the ages. In the 17th century the great Shivaji too tried to live up to the great ideals of the dharma of kings as he understood it from his knowledge of the epics and the shastras as taught to him by his mother.⁹⁸ Living in the tradition of royal greatness Shivaji ushered in a great age for his people, the Marathas, who, buoyed up by the example of their king went on to establish their own empire in India in the first half of the 18th century A.D.

The concept of dharma in polity, then, was a vital tradition in the history of India. Interestingly enough there was a return to this ideal of dharma as an ethical force in the nationalist politics of India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. For Gandhi the whole basis of action in life was morality and it was from the point of view of morality that he judged economics as well as politics. He saw no conflict between true economics and morality and attempted to infuse morality and moral issues into a movement which otherwise would have become just struggle for power.⁹⁹ As Dharendra Mohan Datta says: "Gandhi's great

mission in life was to revolutionize politics by ethics. Through a series of experiences and experiments in private and public life Gandhi became more and more convinced that the problems that face humanity in different spheres of human relation, private and public, could be more effectively and permanently solved by applying moral principles of truth and love."¹⁰⁰ Radhakrishnan, likewise, holds that the basis of the state must be ethical for "the state is not above ethics. It exists essentially for the good of the individual and has therefore no right to demand the sacrifice of the individual, though it has every right to demand the conditions essential for the performance of its task" ¹⁰¹ For him ethics or the concept of dharma has a pre-eminence over all other things and as an advocate of all that is of the finest in Hinduism he constantly comes back to that concept in all his evaluations of social, economic and political actions.

We have seen the comprehensiveness of the concept of dharma and examined its operations in some aspects of individual and social action. Dharma is a code of duty, law, truth and a host of other things among which there is also the sense of dharma as spiritual value. The science of dharma, says the *Yajnyavalkya smriti*, is of greater authority than the science of material gain¹⁰² for, as the *Vaisheshika Sutra* points out both material gain and spiritual good flow from dharma.¹⁰³ It is true that dharma, artha and kama must co-exist without harming each other,¹⁰⁴ but among these the importance of dharma is the highest since it is the means of self-realization brought about through an intense application of dharma to the highest problems of life.¹⁰⁵ And as the *Bhagavata Purana* says all dharma ultimately leads to the Divine.¹⁰⁶ Dharma, therefore, is a spiritual value for the acquisition of which our entire life must be lived.

And finally there is the meaning of dharma as culture. T.S. Elliot describes culture as "that which makes life worth living".¹⁰⁷ We have seen earlier that it is the concept of dharma that lends significance to human endeavour according to Indian

¹⁰⁰ *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 127

¹⁰¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 360

¹⁰² *Yajnyavalkyasmriti*, 2, 2, 21 ¹⁰³ *Vaisheshika Sutra*, 1, 1, 2

¹⁰⁴ *Manavdharmashastra*, 2, 224 ¹⁰⁵ *Yajnyavalkyasmriti*, 1, 1, 1-3, 6-9

¹⁰⁶ *Bhagavata Purana*, 1, 2, 29

¹⁰⁷ T. S. Elliot, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, p. 27

thinking on the subject. Dharma is an instrument of cohesion and integration and as such it imparts its flavour to the whole corpus of values which go by the name of Indian culture. There is hardly any other single term which can so adequately bring out the essence of the Indian attitude to the concept of culture as dharma. The cultured man is called *dharmattha* in many Buddhist texts¹⁰⁸ and he is described as steadfast in morality, truth, wisdom and compassion.¹⁰⁹ He is essentially a tolerant man for he is aware that just as he holds his dharma dear the dharma of others has equal relevance and validity for them.

The range of thought encompassed by the concept of dharma, thus, is most comprehensive. It affects social groups (varna-dharma) and ethical and spiritual striving in an individual's life (acharamadharma), families (kuladharma) and regions (desha-dharma), periods of time (yugadharma) and humanity (manava-dharma). And it controls the state (rajadharma) and thus becomes the instrument of moralizing force. It has so completely permeated Indian thinking and manifested itself so repeatedly and continuously in action that it has almost become the central point of all thought on religion and metaphysics, ethics and polity, law and filial behaviour. One of the meanings of the term dharma is quality or attribute or characteristic and through its universality the concept of dharma has become a norm for all human action in India.

¹⁰⁸ *Dhammapada*, XIX, 2

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, XVI, 9; VIII, 12; X, 14; XIV, 15

CHAPTER THREE

ARTHA

The Pursuit of Prosperity

I

It has been frequently argued that the people of India set little store by material wealth since their all-absorbing aim in life has been to secure their salvation from the round of existence. Like all other great civilizations the Indian civilization too has shown a deep awareness of the importance of spiritual values. Very often this insistence on the primacy of spiritual values has been seized upon to explain the material poverty of the large masses of the people of India. In 1878 F. Max Muller wrote that the "pearl of great price" for the Hindu mind is an "innate disbelief in this world" and an "unhesitating belief in another world".¹ In an earlier chapter we noticed that Sri Aurobindo regards intense spirituality as the most distinguishing mark of the Indian civilization. Rabindranath Tagore stated that the aim of the ancient civilization of India was "not attaining power, and it neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organize men for defensive and offensive purposes, for co-operation in the acquisition of wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realize led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success."² S. Radhakrishnan observes that "from the beginning of her history, India has adored and idealized, not soldiers and statesmen, not men of science and leaders of industry, not even poets and philosophers, who influence the world by their deeds or by their words, but those rarer and more chastened spirits whose greatness lies in what they are and not in what they do; men who have stamped infinity on the thought and life of the country, men who have added to the

¹ F. Max Muller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion*, p. 378

² R. Tagore, *Sadhana—The Realisation of Life*, pp. 13-14

invisible force of goodness in the world. To a world given over to the pursuit of power and pleasure, wealth and glory, they declare the reality of the unseen world and the call of the spiritual life."³ These are weighty pronouncements and deserve careful examination. However, it may be argued that Indian spirituality is more assumed than proved and to hold that spirituality as the sole characteristic of the Indian intellectual tradition is to ignore the persistence of another and parallel tradition which emphasized the pursuit of prosperity as a worthy ideal for a great civilization. The aim of the present chapter is to examine all relevant evidence in support of this tradition of the pursuit of prosperity, subsisting alongside of an ideal of renunciation and non-acquisition, and determine their social co-relates. We will also examine the evidence of conditions of the economic life under which the vast masses of the people lived in an attempt to determine whether these conditions had anything to do with the ultimate predominance of the tradition so eloquently expressed by Tagore and Radhakrishnan.

II

Life, the Hindu works point out, must be motivated by four ideals namely, those of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. We have already examined the meaning and concept of dharma. Kama and moksha are the subjects of subsequent chapters. Of the four ideals dharma and moksha refer to the ethical and spiritual values of life whereas artha and kama are concerned with the "here-and-now". The first two indicate a trend of thinking technically described as *nivritti* or renunciation and non-acquisition whereas the latter represent the positivistic tradition. Non-acquisition and renunciation, thus, are balanced against acquisition and involvement in the pleasures of life and no life can be fully lived unless the proper balance between the two claims of the here-and-now and the hereafter-and-eternal is actively kept in view. The schematic division of life into the four stages or ashramas is also laid down with this object in view. Dharma and artha, then, are the twin traditions which we may designate as the hieratic and folk traditions in the history of Indian ideas. These are the two levels on which Indian thought dwells and action is pursued. To

³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 35

transpose the two terms we have earlier used in our discussion of the Indian view of history namely, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary levels of perception and comprehension, the artha tradition symbolizes the ordinary level whereas the dharma tradition indicates the extraordinary level and in all ages these two levels interpenetrate. These two traditions also stand, in a certain sense, for the spirit of sacerdotalism and anti-sacerdotalism and phases of economic growth and social and economic depression. We will first pass under review all the relevant evidence bearing on the meaning of the concept of artha and then go on to trace its history.

The term artha generally indicates "the attainment of riches and worldly prosperity, advantage, profit, wealth", also "result" in commercial life, "business-matter, business-affair, work, price" and in law "plaint, action, petition".⁴ It means the "whole range of tangible objects that can be possessed, enjoyed and lost, and which we require in daily life for the upkeep of a household, raising of a family and discharge of religious duties, i.e. for the virtuous fulfilment of life's obligations."⁵ The concept of wealth is as old as the early Aryan period, for the *Rig Veda* speaks of wealth as *rayi* which included cattle, food, progeny, dwellings and abundant sustenance.⁶ In many of its hymns the *Rig Veda* Aryans pray for a variety of material goods; requests like "Indra and Soma, do you promptly bestow upon us, preservative, renowned (riches), accompanied by offspring" or "may we be masters of permanent riches" are fairly common.⁷ Even in the *Upanishads* "worldly good is craved for as being even a superior moment in the conception of the highest good". The *Shvetashwataropanishad* has a prayer to the following effect: "Make us not suffer in our babies or in our sons, make us not suffer in lives, or in cows, or in horses; kill not our powerful warriors, O Rudra, so may we offer to thee our oblations for ever and ever."⁸ Then there is the very significant episode of the great idealist Yajnyavalkya going to the king Janaka who asked the philosopher whether he desired wealth

⁴ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. 35 ⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See *Rig Veda*, I, 73, 1; II, 21, 6; III, 1, 19; IV, 36, 9; V, 4, 11; VI, 31, 1; VIII, 6, 9

⁷ *Rig Veda Samhita*, Translated by H. H. Wilson, Edited by E. B. Cowell, Fifth Ashtaka, pp. 21, 38

⁸ See R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*, p. 299

and cattle or debate and victory in it. And the philosopher asked for *both*. As Ranade points out "it is evident that Yajnyavalkya desired both material as well as spiritual good; and in spite of his otherwise supremely idealistic teaching, he possibly wanted to set an example by showing that the consideration of external good cannot be entirely ignored even by idealists as constituting a moment in the conception of the highest good."⁹ All of which goes to show that the concept of *artha* was a strong force until the 7th century B.C. when the major *Upanishads* were being finalized.

It is difficult to speak precisely of the chronology of the *Mahabharata* but it is generally assumed that in its "present form" the text of the great epic was finalized sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 though the materials in it are much older. The "Epic" society, if we may use such a term, was certainly older than the one reflected in the Buddhist texts. Now the *Mahabharata* stresses the great importance of wealth in human life by saying that "what is here regarded as dharma depends entirely on wealth. One who robs another of wealth robs him of his dharma as well. *Poverty is a state of sinfulness*. All kinds of meritorious acts flow from the possession of great wealth, as from wealth spring all religious acts, all pleasures and Heaven itself. Wealth brings about accession of wealth, as elephants capture elephants. Religious acts, pleasure, joy, courage, wrath and learning, all these proceed from wealth. From wealth one's merit increases. He that has no wealth has neither this world nor the next. The man that has no wealth succeeds not in performing religious acts, for the latter spring from wealth like rivers from mountains."¹⁰ Kautilya (3rd century B.C. ?) holds that "wealth and wealth alone, is important, inasmuch as, charity and desire depend upon wealth for their realization."¹¹ According to him the major aim of polity is fourfold namely, "to make acquisitions, to keep them secure, to improve them and to distribute among the deserving the profits of improvement."¹² He is opposed to wide-spread and indiscriminate renunciation since it interferes with economic production and recommends that the state should punish those who renounce the world without having first satisfied

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300

¹⁰ *Mahabharata*, XII, ch. 8; See K. V. Rangaswamy Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, pp. 23-4

¹¹ *Arthashastra*, Trans. by R. Shamashastry, p. 12 ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 18

the claims of society and family. He would not allow ascetics to enter villages of the kingdom for fear that they may cause disturbance in the economic activities of the villagers.¹³ The folk literature reflects this favourable attitude towards acquisition even more strongly. This literature—the *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha*—came to be compiled in the early medieval age (A.D. 700-1100) and expresses the folk tradition. Says the *Panchatantra* "The smell of wealth is quite enough; To wake a creature's sterner stuff; And wealth's enjoyment even more."¹⁴ According to it wealth gives constant vigour, confidence and power¹⁵; that wealth is our next of kin¹⁶; and "The wealthy, though of meanest birth; Are much respected on earth; The poor whose lineage is prized; Like the clearest moonlight, are despised;"¹⁷ poverty is a curse which is worse than death¹⁸; virtue without wealth is of no consequence¹⁹; The lack of money is the root of evil²⁰; beggary is the "shrine of wretchedness, the dwelling-place of tears, the thief of mind, the soil of doubts, the treasury of fears, concerted meanness, home of woe, honour's knell, a form of death to self-esteem and no different from hell."²¹ Similarly the *Kathasaritsagara* goes on pointing out the virtues of wealth.²² It adds that wealth is for enjoyment; mere wealth without enjoyment is useless.²³ And these tales also develop the concept of work for it is declared that it is through work, not mere wishes, that wealth can come and that wealth can belong only to the industrious, brave and discerning.²⁴ This is significant for whenever ancient Indian texts speak of wealth they speak of collective rather than individual wealth whereas these folk-tales preserve a rugged individualism as a necessary part of the concept of prosperity. There is evident admiration expressed in the story of the man who starts with a dead mouse as his sole capital and acquires great wealth in the end through his business foresight and alacrity in cashing in on opportunities.²⁵ In these folk tales, then, what is predominant is the artha tradition though it must be observed that from time to

¹³ Kautilya *Arthashastra*, II, 19

¹⁴ *Panchatantra*, Translated by Arthur W. Ryder, p. 201

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 219

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 209-10

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 208

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11

²² *Ocean of Story*, Translated by R. H. Tawney, I, pp. 10, 67, 111

²³ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 198

²⁴ *Panchatantra*, pp. 220-21, 226

²⁵ *Ocean of Story*, I, p. 62

time the dharma tradition is brought in, in an attempt to give a moral basis to wealth.

The *Shukranitisara*, a medieval text, urges that the "daily acquisition of wealth is proper for the man with wife, children and friends. It is also necessary for charity. Without these what is the good of existence for man?" It further states that "one should carefully preserve wealth which can maintain him in future. So long as there is wealth, one is respected by all. But the man without wealth, though well-qualified, is deserted even by his wife and sons. In this world, wealth is the means to all pursuits. Let him, therefore, try to acquire wealth in legitimate ways, as by learning, service, valour, agriculture, commerce, the practice of crafts and even by mendicancy. Owing to insufficiency of wealth, people occasionally become slaves of others." And finally "the accumulation of wealth and learning should be made even by grains and moments. The man who is desirous of acquiring both shall neglect neither the grains nor the moment because they are trifling."²⁶

That the idea of wealth and its desirability was deeply rooted in the Indian mind is indicated by the analysis to which the concept was subjected. Wealth, it is pointed out, means that which is capital (*dhanam*), a substance (*dravya*), which is earned (*vitta*), capable of individual appropriation (*swapateyya*), gold (*hiranya*), that which is the result of accumulation (*artha*), a source of prosperity (*vibhava*), is capable of enjoyment (*bhogyā*), and is transferrable, thus becoming a subject of dispute and litigation (*vyavaharya*).²⁷ The *Milinda Panha*, the Pali Buddhist text of the 1st century A.D. enumerates the forms of wealth as follows: gold, silver, pearls, diamonds, chank, rock and coral, ruby, *masara* stone, catseye, crystal, quartz, iron ore, copper, brass, bronze, flax, silk, cotton, hemp, wool, rice, paddy, barley, millet, *kudrisa* grams, beans, wheat, oil-seeds, vegetables, perfumes from roots and sap, pith and bark, leaves and flowers and fruits.²⁸ It is significant that this list does not include cattle as a distinct form of wealth indicating thereby that the pastoral basis of wealth was long past. The basis of wealth is economic activity (*varta*) which is speci-

²⁶ *Shukranitisara*, III, 352-5; 364-7

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 645-58

²⁸ See Questions of King Milinda, *Sacred Books of the East*, XXXVI, pp. 101-02

fied by a Buddhist text as agriculture and commerce.²⁹ The *Mahabharata* says that "the root of this world is in varta. It is sustained by varta. So long as the king cherishes varta, everything goes well"³⁰ and the *Kamandaka Nitisara* adds that "when varta is destroyed this world is surely dead though it seems to breathe".³¹ The *Dharmashastras* (200 B.C. to A.D. 400) include agriculture, cattle-breeding, the industrial arts, trade and commerce and money-lending as components of the term varta.

III

This trend of thought which emphasized the intrinsic goodness of wealth had to face the challenge of two trends that were developing in Indian life through the centuries. One was the dread of ostentation and luxury. Manu condemns expenditure on mere ostentation and trifling matters and Shukra recommends the expulsion of the prodigal from the realm.³² Generally speaking the law-makers lay down stringent and often drastic punishments for extravagant spending by those possessed of wealth.³³ This may be explained on the assumption that in ancient Indian economic thought the "centre of activities is man and not wealth";³⁴ that "the interdependence of economics and ethics has been a fundamental assumption of all Indian thought";³⁵ that the "orientation of the Indian mind was towards dharma (duty) and that of Indian culture towards the realization of dharma. It was ultimately *dharmapradhana* and only in an inferior, accessory or instrumental sense, *arthapradhana*."³⁶ Such a view, then, was bound to affect the concept of wealth which was then subjected to extra-economic criteria.

The second trend is the gradual depression in the social status of the classes most directly involved in productive functions. The Buddhist texts frequently refer to higher castes and lower castes and among the latter are included occupations like hunting and trapping, work in leather, pottery, bamboo-work, weaving and the

²⁹ *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, Translated by Chalmers, II, pp. 113-14

³⁰ *Mahabharata*, *Vanaparva*, 67, 35

³¹ *Kamandakanitisara*, I, 12

³² *Shukranitisara*, III, 202

³³ *Manavadharmashastra*, III, 442, 454-5

³⁴ Aiyangar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 70

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19

barber's profession.³⁷ In an earlier chapter it was pointed out how the equation between type of work and social status came about. Already in the *Dharmashastras* (200 B.C.-A.D. 400) the Vaishyas and Shudras, two of the classes most directly involved in creating wealth are described as occupying a low social position. The prejudice against these classes is as old as the Vedic age itself. The Vaishya may be swallowed and digested at will by the state³⁸ and the Shudra is the servant of another who may be dispossessed and slain at will.³⁹ The *Arthashastra* evinces great fear and suspicion of the mercantile guilds for whose control elaborate rules are laid down. This anti-mercantile trend deeply influenced the concept of wealth and synchronizes with the defeat of the Buddhist movement. The mercantile classes and the labouring masses both supported Buddhism and Jainism very enthusiastically and it is significant to note here that the *Dharmashastras* which came to be compiled in their present form certainly after the reign of Asoka (273-232 B.C.) forbade sea voyages which implied a curb on overseas trade, one of the means of acquiring wealth.⁴⁰ Technically the Vaishya was a member of the twice-born order but as the line dividing his occupations from those of the Shudra began thinning, his theoretical rights had little social reality. Also there came to be placed so many restrictions on travelling so essential for trade that compliance with these rules and regulations must have hampered business activity a great deal.⁴¹ This social devaluation of professions directly leading to the creation of wealth, had far-reaching consequences for economic conditions as well as the concept of wealth itself.

On the other hand there was an increasing tendency for Kshatriya and Brahmana classes to amass wealth. The Buddhist works speak of the great wealth amassed by some of the Brahmanas and distinguish between Brahmanas and Brahmana *Gahapatikas*. A Brahmana magnate's wealth is described as amounting to 800 million which is an exaggeration though it does not vitiate the force of the observation that the Brahmanas as a class were beginning to get rich.⁴² The *Digha Nikaya* roundly

³⁷ See *Sutta Vibhanga*, II, 2

³⁸ *Aitareya Brahmana*, VII, 29

³⁹ See A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 143

⁴⁰ *Manavadharmashastra*

⁴¹ *Vishnudharmashastra*; LXIII, 2-51; LXXI, 69

⁴² See *Digha Nikaya*, I, p. 111; *Suttavibhanga*, XIX; *Samyutta Attakatha*, I, p. 137

denounces the greed of the Brahmanas for wealth and women.⁴³ The religious works, especially the law-codes, exhibit great horror of ostentation and luxury on the part of those involved in the process of creation of wealth but their theological ire is seldom roused by the spectacle of the great luxury of the courts of the Kshattriyas!

Almost every description of the royal court, from the most ancient times to the recent British period, smacks of the fabulous. Shukra allots not more than 20 per cent of the total expenditure of the state for direct public purposes, the rest being allotted for the maintenance of the army, reserves, privy purse and administrative expenses.⁴⁴ On the other hand there was a general tendency to limit consumption through sumptuary regulations for the masses of the people. There were also other factors which placed limitations on production like the scarcity of metals, scarcity of capital due to heavy taxation by the state and its predilection for budgeting for recurring surpluses. The net result of all this was that the producing classes always worked under distinct handicaps and the philosophy of disincentives appeared to stand forth in the guise of spiritual values. The persistent image of the conditions of life of the common people through the ages is one of few wants and fewer opportunities to satisfy them adequately.

IV

This is quite different from the image of a land of plenty, of well-fed and contented masses happily engaged in profitable pursuits that created abundant wealth that one usually associates with life in India until the time of the conquest of the land by Britain. What appears nearer the truth is that the large majority of people in India, as indeed in most other countries until recent times, have been poor. The lyric simplicity of rustic life may appear enchanting in poetry and fiction but the economic reality revealed through it is not so attractive. The reasons for this poverty were manifold. One was the comparative scarcity of metals which placed its own limitations on technological developments. Another may be that the ratio between numbers of people and the existing resources has often been adverse to man. A third may be the

⁴³ *Digha Nikaya*, II, p. 245

⁴⁴ *Shukranitisara*, I, 316-317; IV, 7, 24-28

heavy incidence of taxation that the producing classes had to bear. Taxation appears to be high at all periods of which we have any records. The *Jatakas*, Buddhist Birth Stories, express a horror of the tax-gatherers who are often described as robbers,⁴⁵ and Kautilya displays unlimited ingenuity in devising numerous ways of taxing the people. The state in India tended to accumulate large surpluses⁴⁶ and the "upper classes appropriated national wealth and political power. The slave and the hireling, who with their toil, built the edifice of civilization and prosperity remained the deprived and despised underdogs of society."⁴⁷ During the period between 600 B.C. and A.D. 200 there was "pronounced social contrast" between the rich and the poor⁴⁸ and the picture of the poverty of the general masses of agricultural people and their indebtedness, as presented by the *Jatakas*, is a fairly persistent one. In the "Golden Age" of the Guptas (A.D. 319-550) after "the fortunate few had their fortunes assured" society as a whole "that is, the poorer working classes, may not be assumed to be equally prosperous"; on the other hand "the economic condition of many people was very precarious".⁴⁹ Even in that great age "the tax paid by the peasants, with numerous extra dues besides this basic tax, must have been often oppressive, though perhaps not so oppressive as in the less fortunate periods of Indian history."⁵⁰ The Gupta Age, then, may be called the Golden Age "in the same sense as the Elizabethan and the Victorian. These were times of great material and cultural prosperity with great civic buildings, public undertakings, splendour, opulence and luxury—but only for a limited section of the community. Beneath the facade of outward splendour were the toiling masses on whose efforts the whole edifice depended. To warrant the name of the Golden Age, as we in the twentieth century would now interpret it, far better conditions would be required for the whole of society, for the peasant as well as the lord, and economic freedom and prosperity for both."⁵¹ In the ages that followed there were numerous wars and dynastic revolutions, large-scale

⁴⁵ See *Jataka*, II, p. 240; III, p. 319; IV, p. 224; V, p. 106

⁴⁶ Atindranath Bose, *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India*, II, p. 476

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 483

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 485

⁴⁹ Sachindra Kumar Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period*, p. 190

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 70

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190

plunder and destitution carried on by the armies of the Islamic invaders.⁵²

For the later periods we have some fairly trustworthy testimony on the general economic conditions under which the people lived. In the Vijayanagara empire (14th-16th centuries A.D.) it was noticed that "the land was overstocked with people; but those in the country were very miserable, while the nobles were extremely opulent and delighted in luxury."⁵³ T. V. Mahalingam points out in this connection that "though the country was very rich and its resources were great there was great disparity in the condition of the various classes of people. Poverty amidst plenty may be a true description of their condition. While the nobles lived in luxury and were lavish in their tastes and expenditure and indulged in extravagant and reckless expenditure in perfumes, unguents and personal ornaments, the mass of the people lived under conditions of extreme poverty even during normal times, not to speak of periods of famine and drought."⁵⁴ The same authority further states that "at certain periods of Vijayanagara history the taxes were heavy. The people could not bear the weight of such heavy taxation and were, hence, at times forced to sell their lands to meet the government demands."⁵⁵ Linschoten speaks of the life of the poor in this empire in the following words: "Their household style is a mat upon the ground to sleep upon, and a pit or hole in the ground to beat their rice in, with a pot or two to seeth it in, and so they live and gain much, as it is a wonder."⁵⁶ Large populations and heavy taxation, low social status associated with the most directly productive functions and the heavy burden of the nobility and the state were largely responsible for the poverty of the masses of the people in the Vijayanagara times. The same held true of the Bahamanids and the Deccan sultans whose rapacity was further accentuated by religious intolerance and bigotry. In Mughal times the state carried on the tradition of accumulating vast surpluses to even

⁵² See R. C. Majumdar, and A. D. Pusalkar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People, The Age of Imperial Kanauj and The Struggle for Empire*, pp. 241 ff; pp. 274 ff

⁵³ See W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, p. 267

⁵⁴ T. V. Mahalingam, *Economic Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, p. 202

⁵⁵ T. V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, p. 92

⁵⁶ Purchas, *His Pilgrimage*, p. 262

greater heights, for Akbar's accumulation in cash alone is estimated to have amounted to some 40 million sterling while the total accumulation could have been well-worth over 200 million sterling.⁵⁷ The picture at the other end, where the masses lived is described by a Dutch chronicle of the times in the following words: "But the common people or inhabitants of the country are poor. They have always been plagued by the gnawing worm (poverty) which has consumed them so much that they have nothing more left than subsistence or what is required to fill their stomach. The reason is that governors and administrators employ all means of exploiting a town and robbing it on some pretext or other. Should there happen to be a bad harvest, so that the peasants cannot pay their revenue imposed upon them they are charged with rebellion; the land is confiscated and their women and children sold."⁵⁸ W. H. Moreland finds that "the upper classes, small in number and consisting largely of foreigners, enjoyed incomes which were very great relatively to reasonable needs, and as a rule they spent these incomes lavishly on objects of luxury and display. They did practically nothing towards promoting the economic development of the country, and such part of their income as was not spent, was hoarded in unproductive forms. . . . The great bulk of the population lived on the same economic plane as now; we cannot be sure whether they had a little more or a little less to eat, but they probably had fewer clothes, and they were certainly worse off with regard to household utensils and to some of the minor conveniences and gratifications of life. . . ."⁵⁹ That the state occasionally turned into the great expropriator is indicated by the activities of rulers like Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316) which were sometimes later emulated as Sir Thomas Roe seems to suggest when he says that the "king robs all".⁶⁰ Francisco Pelasart, chief of the Dutch factory at Agra speaks of "the manner of life of the rich in their great superfluity and absolute power, of the common people in their utter subjection and poverty—poverty so extreme and so miserable that the life of the people cannot be adequately depicted or described, for here

⁵⁷ Vincent Smith, *Akbar, the Great Moghul*, p. 347

⁵⁸ Brij Narain, and Shri Ram Sharma, *A Contemporary Dutch Chronicle*, p. 93

⁵⁹ W. H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, pp. 304-05

⁶⁰ W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, p. 269

is the home of stark want, and the dwelling place of bitter woe."⁶¹ And Moreland concludes "Weavers, naked themselves, toiled to clothe others. Peasants themselves hungry, toiled to feed the towns and cities."⁶² It may be conceded that the conditions of the large masses of the people elsewhere in the world were not much better and that the "the greatest good of the largest number" as an ideal of political and economic activity is but a very recent phenomenon. Even today there is a great disparity in the incomes earned by the commissar and the common worker under systems allegedly established to eliminate class distinctions. It may also be argued that the picture drawn by foreign travellers cannot be held to be utterly disinterested and objective. But the mass of evidence through the ages is such as to indicate that the concept of individual wealth as revealed in folk literature was substantially changed to that of collective wealth for ruling classes and their sacerdotal supporters and that the relation between work and wealth was changed into one of work on one side and wealth on the other. A folk tale may say that wealth without enjoyment is useless but it applied more and more to classes that were not directly involved in the productive process.

V

Why did the state sweep off the surplus from the hands of the classes most directly engaged in the production of wealth in such a persistent and pernicious fashion? Among several reasons mention must be made of the existence of perpetual warfare in a country of continental dimensions under a multiplicity of states and principalities most of the time. Wars are a staple of the historical chronicle of India as it is of other countries. The Indian states maintained large armies. Chandragupta Maurya's forces (324-299 B.C.) numbered some 600,000 men, numerous elephants, chariots and cavalry.⁶³ This, obviously, was the standing army of the emperor and besides this there must have existed other provincial armies. In a single battle like that of Kalinga, waged by Asoka to crush the Kalingas (261 B.C. ?), the king speaks of a 100,000 as being slain and a 150,000 as being

⁶¹ See W. H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, p. 198

⁶² W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, p. 279

⁶³ B. G. Gokhale, *Ancient India, History and Culture*, p. 37

deported.⁶⁴ Harsha (A.D. 606-647) maintained an army of 50,000 infantry, 100,000 cavalry and hundreds of elephants.⁶⁵ To this must be added the numbers maintained by the Chalukya Pulakeshin II, the Pallavas and other rulers of the times. It is possible that the figures for Harsha are exaggerated though it is reasonable to assume that in the first half of the 7th century A.D. the country had to support a military force of no less than a million. The productivity of agriculture and industries in those days must have been restricted by technological backwardness. It must also be remembered that at that time the number of people living in tribes must have been considerably more than what it is today which is estimated at roughly 10 per cent of the total population of the country. Considering the rapid de-tribalization of this tribal population in recent years it would be no exaggeration to say that the tribal population in the India of the 7th century A.D. could have been of the order of anywhere 40 per cent of the entire population. This population was, in economic terms, even less productive than the settled population and hence the burden of supporting this vast army must have been borne by some 50 per cent of the population. If we deduct from this population the two classes, the Kshatriyas and the Brahmanas, who are traditionally described as not being involved in the directly productive processes, the percentage of people who had to work to support the armies was 40 per cent. Assuming that the population then was around 100 million the cost in economic terms of the military expenditure must have been heavy. To this must be added the cost of the wars themselves. The administration, religion and maintenance of nobility further cost enormous amounts as a consequence of all of which the productive classes must have been left with very little of the surplus they produced. The Islamic invasions meant a colossal drain of wealth from the hands of the people and untold sufferings for them. The Muslim sultans and Mughal emperors maintained large forces and both these periods are periods full of wars. These wars continued through the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries and exacted their own economic cost from the people.

The court and bureaucracy were other items of expenditure.

⁶⁴ See *Kalinga Edict*

⁶⁵ B. G. Gokhale, *Op. Cit.*, p. 83

Tavernier, Bernier and other travellers of the Mughal period comment on the lavish expenditure of the Mughal court. Even earlier there has always been a tradition of a numerous bureaucracy. For the Maurya age there is the evidence of Kautilya confirmed by Megasthenes.⁶⁶ Vijayanagara was not backward in this respect.⁶⁷ The Mughal functionaries received extravagant salaries and the Mughals "cast their financial net very widely over the entire population. No class of their subjects escaped contributing to their treasury. The poorest classes always paid the salt tax; the artisans paid the professional tax, if not the licence fee; cultivators paid land-revenue, the Hindus paid the Jizia (poll tax) from 1526 to 1563 and again from 1679 to 1707. The customs and transit dues were also passed on to their customers by the merchants . . . considering their resources, the poorest classes seemed to have been taxed the most. . . ."⁶⁸ This tradition of expensive bureaucracy was carried on under the British.

VI

The state, thus, in many circumstances, acted as a kind of disincentive to increased production on the part of the classes most directly involved in the creation of wealth. Heavy taxation meant a decreased ability on the part of the peasant and artisan to invest in their respective professions which, in turn, implied technological stagnation. The persistence of primitive techniques limited productivity and as the state grew more burdensome it made increasing attempts to squeeze out more and more surplus from the people. Agriculture, industry and trade were often beset with adverse conditions created by the state and if successful invited the rapacity of the various organs of that state.

It is in these circumstances that the great conceptual change seems to have taken place. There has always existed the two parallel traditions of acquisition of material goods and renunciation of the world at all stages in the history of ideas in India. If poverty was going to be the lot of the great majority of the people it was necessary to create a conceptual superstructure to make it

⁶⁶ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 320 ff.

⁶⁷ T. V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pp. 98-101

⁶⁸ Sri Ram Sharma, *Mughal Government and Administration*, pp. 66-7

appear both convincing, inevitable and desirable. Material for this conceptual superstructure was always at hand. This material was developed by the great ascetical movements which prominently appeared at three distinct stages in Indian history. The first wave came in the 6th century B.C. symbolized in the rise of Buddhism and Jainism and this was related to the break-up of the tribal societies of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, areas under the impact of the growing monarchical polities. The second phase appeared in the growth of Vedantic ideas in the early medieval times when there was a general failure of imperial polity after the decline of the Guptas. The third made itself manifest during the 15th and 16th centuries just as the great Mughal empire was being established. These were periods of great social crises and created an atmosphere which favoured a withdrawal from the world. The otherworldliness in the Indian tradition, thus, when examined in this context, reveals itself to be a product of recurring social crises. These crises also helped sacerdotalism become triumphant and with its triumph the tradition of artha as a secular and acquisitive tradition yielded place to the tradition of non-acquisition and renunciation.

We have, thus, two concepts at the two ends. There is the concept of artha stressing individual endeavour and collective prosperity. This individual endeavour, in direct economic terms, concerned the Vaishyas and Shudras who had to bear the major burden of carrying on the main productive functions in society. At the other end were the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas. The first, supplied the administrative and military needs of the society over whom they ruled while the latter were responsible for fulfilling the religious and spiritual needs of the people. Their functions were only marginally productive of collective wealth. Theoretically the Brahmanas were called upon to live a life of austerity and spiritual and intellectual endeavour and most of them did this. But there were members of the class that were rich and who supported the Kshatriyas. In the initial stages (7th to 5th century B.C.) there was conflict between the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas for social eminence and leadership and the rise of Buddhism and Jainism reflect this conflict. With the growth of the preponderance of the *Dharmashastra* school of thinking that conflict was resolved with the forging of an alliance of the two classes, though not overtly or necessarily aimed against the interests of the Vaishyas

and Shudras. This resolution of the conflict enthroned sacerdotalism in religious and philosophical thinking and led to the rise of the power of the Kshatriya. Precisely at this point we find that the theories associating divine power with kingship secure increasing acceptance. The Brahmana became an ardent supporter of the big state and attempted to sanctify it with the revival of the great Vedic sacrifices of old during the Gupta and post-Gupta periods. The rise of the mercantile and artisan classes had indicated a trend towards the growth of secular powers but this growth was arrested with the defeat of the Buddhist and Jainistic movements and with that defeat sacerdotalism was firmly entrenched. This sacerdotalism was anti-mercantilist in its spirit and was particularly harsh against the Shudras.

We might also consider another factor which led to the relative decline of the artha ideal. India, through the ages, has suffered from a relative paucity of metals and has experienced a widespread scarcity of precious metals. The break-up of the Maurya empire, in spite of its burdensome nature from the point of view of the productive classes, was, to a certain extent, an economic catastrophe. At the break-up of this empire what emerged, in an increasing measure, was a pattern of "villagism" in which a stagnant technology limited production, the surplus from which was squeezed by an expensive state. But that did not lead to a speedy collapse of the Indian society, for two reasons. One was that the state itself suffered from limiting factors like the vastness of the country and the poor means of communications. Secondly, however small the surplus, it was nonetheless substantial as it was collected from the vast masses of people engaged in creating wealth. The stagnant technology itself was, in some measure, supported in its continued regimen by a large population. The dominant impression that the foreign travellers through the ages give of the country is the over-population of the inhabited areas. There may not have been an *absolute* over-population; what might have happened was that there was always an over-stretching of existing resources in inhabited areas by the population. These conditions made the supply of labour cheap and plentiful. The caste system with its many rules and regulations enforced by the state under sacerdotal domination obviated the necessity of resorting to overt slavery though that institution was both known and practised from time to time. The low social status associated

with the most productive tasks restricted the inflow of new talent and ideas into the occupations thus stratifying technological development and skills. The rural economy, wherein production was by and large for immediate consumption, placed limitations on the growth of trade in common articles of manufacture. The various imposts on the articles of merchandise restricted the operations and profits of trade within the country which was further hampered by the primitive means of communications. The social ideas reflected the economic reality which was rationalized and glorified through the instrumentality of concepts of non-acquisition and renunciation. When the ideal of *nivritti*-renunciation prevailed over that of *pravritti*-active endeavour, wealth and its enjoyment there was a revaluation of values and the balance was decidedly in favour of the next world rather than this. The balance may have been restored by social change and revolution but these were made well-nigh impossible by the growth of a rigid caste system and the village-dominated political structure. The kingdom and empire were, in fact, confederations of innumerable villages with a sprinkling, and just a sprinkling, of towns and cities which had only a peripheral role to play in the total production of the country. To control such a conglomeration of innumerable and almost autonomous entities without constant recourse to force it was necessary to create an institution of prestige and power and the big state was that institution. This prestige required pomp, ceremony, pageantry and ostentation backed by a large standing army and a numerous bureaucracy. All of these meant more wealth to be taken away from the classes engaged in creating wealth and less wealth in their hands. To this may be added the cost of war, frequent and often predatory, imposed by the existence of many states located within a single geographical framework.

Along with the state religion too was becoming more expensive. If the Vedic sacrifices were wasteful and extravagant the temples and monasteries used as much, if not more, wealth. It is noteworthy that the Islamic invaders treated the temples as their most profitable targets for by their destruction the crusaders of Islam could not only satisfy their conscience but also fill their coffers with the looted wealth of the temples. Though the temples used up large amounts of wealth in many cases they also encouraged and maintained a number of activities which helped the economy

of the areas in which they were located.⁶⁹ But in Muslim India where large amounts were expended on mortuary architecture this meant a heavy drain on the resources of the people. Most of the grandeur of the Muslim period of Indian history is contained in the fabulous palaces, the rich mosques and the extravagant mausoleums and formidable forts for which the people, in the ultimate analysis, had to pay. Muslim rule also led to the growth of an extravagant nobility who were at best middlemen of the empire and its armed retainers having very little to do with those processes which added to the wealth of the country. The size of this burden can be guessed from the fact that at the outset of his reign, Aurangzeb, in order to make the people forget his fratricidal atrocities, abolished a large number of taxes indicating thereby that at least twice their number must have been imposed before his time.⁷⁰ And the new imperial state that replaced the grand Mughals through the closing decades of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries A.D. carried on this tradition of high taxation. The Permanent Settlement enforced by Lord Cornwallis (1793) made of rent-collectors landlords overnight. The new landlords extorted high rents from the cultivators, paid fixed dues to the Government and became wealthy on the rest. The introduction of new forms of revenue and its collection made of land a commodity which could be taken over by the moneylenders from the defaulting farmers. Under the economic revolution ushered in under the British impact in India a new class of indigenous entrepreneurs sprang up while the conditions of the peasantry and the artisans deteriorated. The old nobility continued to enjoy its privileges, albeit in an attenuated form; the destruction of indigenous industry, in the face of competition from machine-made goods, rendered millions of artisans jobless and these added to the pressure of population on the agricultural pursuits. Fragmentation and subinfeudation of holdings made of agriculture the least lucrative of occupations. The splendour of the viceregal palaces had for its background the grinding poverty of the masses of the people, who remained, as before, deprived of the just rewards of their labour.

⁶⁹ See V. G. Ramkrishna Aiyer, *Economy of the South Indian Temple*, pp. 9-12

⁷⁰ Jadu Nath Sarkar, *Short History of Aurangzeb*, p. 101

VII

Poverty, as the foregoing survey has revealed, thus, was both persistent and all-pervasive over large periods of Indian history for those classes that were most directly involved in the work of production of wealth. There was little that the masses could do against it save face it in a spirit of philosophical resignation. The stress on individual effort was a positive concept which was robbed of its vitality through an interpretation of its results leading to an increase of collective wealth in which the classes that created that wealth had little share. Then, there was the association of low social status attached to those forms of economic activity which were most directly productive. This happens in all hierarchical societies all over the world. This low social status came to be interpreted as a result of a past karma which view condemned all such activity as an expiation of past guilt without holding out the hope that present endeavour would result in a happy life here and now. If the state robbed the producers of their rightful share of wealth accruing from the prosperity created by that wealth the fatalistic interpretation of the doctrine of karma induced the belief that the hardships of life even with hard endeavour in productive tasks were both necessary and inevitable. The doctrines of non-acquisition and renunciation were thus both necessary and adequate to satisfy the doubts raised in the social mind. An ascetical temper is a product of an age of crisis which makes withdrawal from the world seem the only way out. The Buddha's withdrawal from the world into the wilderness was a prelude to his re-entry as the prophet of a new system of ethics and philosophy. But the monastic movement ushered under the Buddhist dispensation increasingly lost its social content. It is not necessary to go into the history of the Indian ascetical movements and the temper created by them. Suffice it to say here that the growth of this ascetical temper was closely linked with a deep social and economic crisis which was responsible for forcing the concept of artha into the background and raising the ideal of non-acquisition to the dignity of a philosophy of life. We have observed before that there were always present these two trends, almost two levels of thought, in Indian thinking. The objective conditions were ranged against the importance of the artha concept because of the operation of a variety of factors which we have indicated

above. But we must notice here a somewhat curious situation. While the ascetical movements like Buddhism and Jainism were at their peak there was accelerated economic activity as indicated in the rise of powerful guilds of mercantile and artisan interests. But when the force of these ascetical movements began to ebb there arose philosophies which were anti-mercantile in spirit and almost anti-labour in attitude. These philosophies are reflected in the *Dharmashastras*. It seems that whereas the ascetical movements were rejected by these philosophies the ascetical temper of non-acquisition was recommended by them to the classes engaged in the production of wealth. Kautilya and the *Dharmashastras* do not take kindly to asceticism; the latter allow a man to adopt the ascetical life only when he has fulfilled the obligations of studentship, of a householder and finally of a hermit.⁷¹ But though asceticism as an institution is frowned upon, some of the ascetical ideals like few possessions, contentment and the primacy of spiritual values over those of this world are avidly accepted and recommended in theory for the Brahmana and almost completely for the Shudra. It is true that there is a general relaxation of sumptuary regulations for the Shudra, who may eat and drink many an item forbidden to the twice-born.⁷² But in economic terms the Shudra was the servant of the twice-born and had rights to property only to the extent that his servile position allowed. We have referred to the feeling of dread with which luxury and big-spending by individuals is regarded in the law books. This may reflect both an economic necessity as well as a social ideal. The reality was that of the scarcity of capital and an eagerness for its proper utilization so that the state may continue to draw off the surplus necessary for its maintenance and the sustenance of the elements which enthusiastically supported it. But there was also the fear of wealth being retained in the hands of the Vaishyas and Shudras for wealth was power and power can always challenge established authority. Kautilya shows great fear of the big corporations and recommends strict control over them.⁷³ These controls, when vigorously applied, must have led to the decline of large-scale corporate activity by which alone great wealth could be produced. This anti-mercantilism was inspired

⁷¹ *Vishnudharmashastra*, III, 3; XCIV, 1

⁷² *Ibid.*, LI, 1-57

⁷³ *Kautilya Arthashastra*, IV, 2

by a social purpose which was detrimental to the vigour of the concept of artha.

In the subsequent ages recurrent wars and expensive states continued to deprive the artha concept of much of its validity and significance. Why should a man go on producing wealth when a sultan like Alauddin Khilji could order expropriation on the most fanciful pretexts?⁷⁴ Under the Mughals the conditions were somewhat better, but only slightly so. The *Mahabharata* may declare that poverty was a state of sinfulness but that state of sinfulness almost became a condition of the normal life of the masses of the country. That poverty was created by the paucity of metals, primitive technology, scarcity of capital, high taxation by the state and the need to maintain classes that had very little to do with the task of creation of wealth. The triumph of the concept of dharma (duty to yield) over artha (the right to acquire wealth) reflected a pattern of economic organization which was not conducive to broad-based individual prosperity. The philosophy of austerity and simplicity was economically necessary and socially helpful.

VIII

These concepts controlled the thinking of the masses of the people. Under the Islamic impact there was scarcely anything of significance added to the content of economic thought. The Islamic period of Indian history was a period of great stresses and tensions which though mainly reflected in religious behaviour were essentially economic in their content. The Islamic state in India was the great expropriator which drew its support from mercenary armies based on numerous fiscal and economic privileges. The despotism of the sultans and the Mughal emperors suffered only from its own contradictions and obeyed no restraining authority from thinkers and advisers of the subject race. The grandeur of the palaces, mosques and mausoleums conceal but partially the poverty of the masses of the people born of exactions by the state and the necessity to maintain large numbers of parasitical elements by the classes that created wealth. A Shah Jahan could afford to spend millions of rupees on the creation of a magnificent

⁷⁴ See Ishwari Prasad, *A Short History of Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 120-21

monument to the memory of his queen who died during her thirteenth childbirth but that monarch is not known to have spent much money on irrigation or road-building. An Aurangzeb spent enormous amounts killing off his brothers, liquidating the Deccan Sultanates and battling the Marathas but could spare little for nation-building activities. Sher Shah Sur and Akbar showed great awareness of increasing the prosperity of the state but they are exceptions as is Firuz Tughlaq, who in spite of his ridiculous bigotry, paid much attention to the improvement of the irrigational system in the Doab and created conditions favourable for trade. The thinkers of the age, the Ulamas, Maulavis and others scarcely went beyond the confines of their traditional thought and had little to say about the concept of prosperity and the means to create it.

It was only after the Western impact was felt that there began a new interest in economic thought and ideals. In the second half of the 19th century men like Dadabhai Nawroji (1825-1917), Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901), Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1884-1915) and Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1904) addressed themselves to the task of an examination of the economic consequences of British rule in India. Dadabhai Nawroji first originated the "drain" theory and Gokhale and others criticized British economic policies in the spheres of public finance, taxation, banking, industrialization and revenue system. They were influenced by Locke, Leibniz, the philosophers of the Classical English school of political economy as well as Fredrick List, the German and Carey, the American. Individualism, ideas of progress and acceptance of wealth as the basis of that progress were some of the major constituents of this new school of political thought.⁷⁵ The Indian National Congress, too, in its resolutions began to express distinct economic objectives and Mahatma Gandhi began to preach his economic doctrines like the "trusteeship" theory and *Sarvodaya* through the pages of his journals, *Young India* and the *Harijan*. In the 30s was set up the National Planning Committee which prepared a blue-print for the economic development of the Indian nation. Gandhism and Socialism have been the two dominant influences on the old concept of artha which now seems to be coming into its own.

⁷⁵ See P. K. Gopalkrishnan, *Development of Economic Ideas in India* (1880-1914), pp. 38-43; 59-63; 83-6; 101-05

In the economic ideas of Mahatma Gandhi there is seen a new synthesis of the twin concepts of dharma and artha. Gandhiji rejects class war and pleads for class conciliation. He argues in favour of a concept of "trusteeship" whereby the owners of the means of production would regard themselves more as trustees of their property rather than absolute owners. His ideal, he stated, was "equal distribution" of the nation's wealth but since this is not possible he would accept "equitable distribution" as the next best.⁷⁶ He wanted to abolish the conflict between capital and labour which meant "the levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand, and a levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other."⁷⁷ For him the real meaning of equal distribution is that "each man shall have the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more." This change must be brought about through non-violence and for this it must proceed on the basis of the individual as a unit of such reconstruction. The first step in this direction is to reduce wants to a minimum. This is very much in consonance with the ancient Indian economic ideal of limitation of consumption. Gandhiji also rejects the machine as the sole instrument of production and insists on the minimum use of machines. He fears that the time is fast coming when human beings will become slaves of machines and human values will atrophy. According to Gandhiji "true economics never militates against the highest ethical standards, just as all true ethics worth its name must at the same time be also good economics. An economics that inculcates Mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak is a false and dismal science."⁷⁸ He argues in favour of the decentralization of industry and has given bread-labour an important place in his economic scheme. He does not favour state control and looks upon any "increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because, although apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress."⁷⁹ His ideal is that of a decentralized society of innumerable village republics engaged in production primarily for local consumption. The economic aim of Gandhism,

then, is to enable every individual to have the minimum necessary for life and in such thinking there is no room for any objectives of affluence not because society cannot create such affluence but that affluence is not a necessary condition of a fruitful and meaningful life. In this there is a return to the concept of a non-acquisitive society dedicated to fulfil the demands of the concept of dharma. This is sarvodaya, a philosophy of all-round growth in terms of material and spiritual values of the Indian civilization. The technique of sarvodaya is based on non-violence and truth which alone, in Gandhian thinking, can bring about lasting and peaceful social change through the conversion of the individual. Acharya Vinoba Bhave's *Bhoodan* (Voluntary land distribution) movement is a prominent example of action in pursuit of the ends of the philosophy of sarvodaya.

IX

The other influence on Indian economic thinking in recent decades is that of Socialism. While in the early stages there was an acceptance, more or less complete, of the economic premises of Marxism there is a trend away from doctrinaire Marxism in recent years. The Indian economic thinkers of the closing decades of the 19th and opening decades of the 20th century were impressed with the liberal economic dogma which thought in terms of the wealth of the nation and of fair distribution among the various classes comprising Indian society. This Western influence was followed by another Western influence of radical thought through Marxism of the orthodox variety and Democratic Socialism which called for social justice and an equalitarian ethos brought about through peaceful democratic procedures. In this trend of thought there is a re-emergence of the concept of artha as being most vital in the life of the Indian society. Jawaharlal Nehru has been a Socialist through the major part of his political career and through his influence the Congress party and the Indian government accepted the establishment of a "socialistic pattern" of society as the ultimate end of Indian endeavour. The two Five Year Plans were drafted on this premise. It is stated: "The central objective of public policy and of national endeavour in India since Independence has been promotion of rapid and balanced economic development. The first five year plan was a step in that direction."

The First Plan attempted "to strengthen the economy at the base and to initiate institutional changes which would facilitate more rapid advance in future". The Second Plan (1957-1962) aims at carrying forward the process started under the First Plan providing for "increase in production, in investment and in employment."⁸⁰ The Plans are designed to increase the national income and the per capita income for the Indian masses thus bringing them out of their previous existence of subsistence and frustration. It is interesting to note here that there is awareness of bringing about institutional changes in the structure of the Indian society. The Indian Constitution has declared the practice of discrimination against the untouchables and the backward classes as offences against the law of the land. This is a great revolution in the matter of concepts for, the Indian Constitution and the Plans indicate that the era of the concept of non-acquisition and renunciation is now over and conceptually the country is now embarked on a journey that will ultimately lead to the abolition of enforced poverty. The prosperity that is sought is as much collective as it is individual and it is in this that there is a profound change in concepts. The ancient concept of artha emphasized collective prosperity and thus led to a situation wherein the two higher classes lived in affluence created by the labours of the two lower classes. The division then was that it was artha for the Kshatriyas and Brahmanas who preached dharma and did little to create artha which they enjoyed and dharma for the Vaishyas and Shudras who created artha but were so squeezed by the state as to leave very little of the surplus they created in their hands. This does not mean that the regime of dharma is over; it simply means that from now on the two dominant concepts in thinking relating to corporate life will be that of artha and dharma for all individuals. This mode of thinking is a fusion of three distinct strands of thought. One is that of Western Liberalism with its passion for individual liberty and freedom; that of Democratic Socialism which insists on maximizing human needs rather than minimizing them as the Gandhians would like, and, finally, the ancient Indian concept of ethics and economics being interdependent. This recognition of spiritual values and their great role in human life is an important Indian contribution to current economic thinking much of which is inspired by Western

⁸⁰ *Second Five Year Plan*, pp. 1-2

ideals. The emphasis on artha will not lead to the disintegration of spiritual thinking and values as the "holy man" is still an important figure for the masses. What seems to be happening is that the old imbalance whereby artha was regarded as of lesser significance than moksha and dharma is being corrected. The common man is conscious of the other world but is no longer prepared to forget completely this world and its needs. The old injunction that "poverty is a state of sinfulness" is taking on a new meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

K A M A

The Pursuit of Pleasure

"HAPPINESS" says the *Mahabharata* "is said to be of two kinds, viz., bodily and mental. Both in this and the other, the visible and invisible fruits (of action) are specified (in the *Vedas*) for the sake of happiness. There is nothing more important than happiness among the fruits of consequences of the triple aggregate (Dharma, Artha and Kama). Happiness is desirable. It is an attribute of the self. Both virtue and profit are sought for its sake. Virtue is its root. This, indeed, is its origin. All acts have for their end the attainment of happiness."¹ Now this happiness as a state of the mind and as a condition of life is both proximate and ultimate. Dharma is the instrument of securing that ultimate happiness which is Moksha or liberation from the round of existence. Artha and Kama are concerned with this world—the "here and now". There is nothing wrong with preoccupation with the acquisition of artha provided the means used are those that are recognized as righteous.² While pleasure is legitimate an addiction to pleasure "occasions contempt and loss of wealth and throws the addicted person into the company of thieves, singers, players on musical instruments and other undesirable persons". Thus warns Kautilya.³ We have had occasion in the earlier parts of this book to notice the two dominant strands in Indian thought namely, that of commitment to the world and its opposite, turning away from the world. The world has been regarded as attractive but the consequences of this attraction in spiritual terms are disastrous. An ideal king, says Manu, knows the respective values of virtue, pleasure and wealth.⁴ It was pointed out in the chapter on Artha that the positivist trend relating to the world and its affairs and happiness in them was deflected in its development by the growth of ideas of renunciation and possessionlessness as

¹ *Mahabharata*, Shanti parva, 190, 6-7, 9

² *Dhammapada*, 84 ³ *Arthashastra*, (Trans.) Shamsastry p. 355

⁴ *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 26

the ultimate criteria of real happiness. These ideas first grew in monastic circles whose rise was an expression of recurrent crises in the body of Indian society. But though the ideas of renunciation and other-worldliness tended to dominate Indian thinking the philosophy of pleasure was never completely submerged and was always inclined to be present like a ghost at a spiritual banquet. The world was too real to be ignored persistently. The needs of the body and the mind were too insistent to be completely suppressed and it was recognized that such suppression would finally lead to serious disorders in the pattern of organized social life. The inclusion of Kama as an ideal of life was a sign of this recognition. Besides, there were also rising schools of thought which marked a revolt against the tyranny of metaphysics. The *Lokayatas* and the school of Charvaka were the elements that pursued the philosophy of "here and now" with single-minded attention. The *Sarvadarshanasamgraha* frankly admits that "the efforts of Charvaka are indeed hard to be eradicated, for the majority of living beings hold by the current refrain: While life is yours, live joyously; None can escape Death's searching eye; When once this frame of ours they burn, How shall it ev'r again return?"⁵ It is not necessary here to go into the details of the philosophical postulates of materialism. There is only one authentic and extensive text of this school extant and that, too, is polemical in intent. The other texts which argue against this school cannot be expected to give a sympathetic or objective account of its theories which are so sincerely detested by the orthodox schools. Charvaka rejected the Vedic tradition and its metaphysical theories. He denounced the Vedic ritual and priestcraft and mockingly asked "If a beast slain in the *Jyotishtoma* rite will itself go to heaven; why then does not the sacrificer forthwith offer his own father?"⁶ He accused the Brahmanas of having started the various rites and ritual as a means of their own livelihood and is reported to have exhorted "while life remains let a man live happily, let him feed on *ghee* (clarified butter) even though he runs in debt; When once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again?"⁷ Such views were naturally regarded

⁵ *Sarvadarshanasamgraha*, See S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, (Edrs).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, pp. 227-228

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 234

as the most heterodox of all heterodoxies and were subjects of fierce and persistent condemnation not only by the orthodox but also by the heterodox schools like the Buddhists and Jains. The Buddhists refused to have anything to do with those who rejected the doctrine of karma and admission to the Order was prohibited to them.⁸ But in spite of such weighty and powerful antagonism the philosophies of pleasure continued to influence the minds of men and hence they had to be transformed and accommodated so as to enable the dominant trends of thought to control them better. The inclusion of kama as one of the four ideals of life is an attempt at such transformation and accommodation on the philosophical level of the importance of the concept of pleasure.

If pleasure is legitimate as an end in life its legitimacy must be based on certain criteria. Such a legitimacy came to be interpreted in increasingly spiritual terms leading to the sublimation of the erotic element through its association with religious expression and symbolism. As Ananda K. Coomaraswamy states, in India "the conditions of human love, from the first meeting of eyes to ultimate self-oblivion, have seemed spiritually significant, and there has always been a free and direct use of sexual imagery in religious symbolism. On the one hand physical union has seemed to present a self-evident image of spiritual unity; on the other, operative forces, as in modern scientific method, are conceived as male and female, positive and negative."⁹ Salvation may be positive and pleasures of life negative in the final evaluation of human life but the negative must operate as a matrix for the positive to become significant. The philosophy of salvation, therefore, can only develop in all its glory as an assumption proceeding from the inadequacy of the philosophy of pleasure without directly invalidating its premises or appeal.

II

The appeal of female beauty and its mystery occupies a prominent place in the concept of pleasure. This ideal of female beauty is described by all classical writers. Kalidasa, for instance, regards lips the colour of young buds, arms like lotus stalks, a slender

⁸ The *Aggita Jatilakas* were given concession in *parivasa* because they believed in *Karma*. See Oldgenbury *Vinaya Pitara I Mahavagya*. p. 71

⁹ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 44

waist and swaying hips and youth pervading every limb as essential constituents of feminine beauty.¹⁰ Even the more prosaic *Puranas* think it appropriate to lay down certain characteristics of feminine beauty. Describing the ideal wife, the *Garuda Purana* says: "She who speaks sweetly to her husband and is a clever manager of household affairs, is a true wife. She who is one in spirit with her lord, and devotes her whole self to his happiness, is a true wife. He whose wife decorates her person with sandal paste, and perfumes her body after her daily ablution, talks little and agreeably, partakes of small quantities of food, is ever fond of him, and is constantly engaged in acts of piety and virtue with a view to bringing happiness and prosperity to the house, and is ever ready to yield to procreative desires of her lord, is not a man, but the lord of heaven."¹¹ The ideal of happiness in love is always that of married love. Classical Sanskrit literature usually portrays this sentiment and sacred and legal literature is particularly concerned with these aspects of a woman's life related to her roles as a wife and mother.¹² It is only in the great tradition of the devotional songs that poetic theory can tolerate reference to love which may not be necessarily in the context of wedlock. The loves of Krishna and the milkmaids of Brindaban are instances of divine love in which the laws of human beings are not strictly operative. Poets like Vidyapati and Chandidas, therefore, are free to speak of "shapely hips", "slender waist" and "plum-like breasts growing larger and harder and crisper".¹³

But whatever the sanctity of love in wedlock or spiritual love there always stood in the background the enchantress whose avocation was love. The courtesan is a figure with a long history. She has been there since Vedic times.¹⁴ Buddhist books frequently have references to the courtesan and her wiles.¹⁵ And Kautilya is realist enough to recognize that she is an inevitable part of society and seeks to regulate her behaviour and calling through the instrumentality of the superintendent of courtesans.¹⁶ He is also

¹⁰ *Shakuntala*, I, 21; II, 36

¹¹ *Agnipurana*, 224, 3-8; *Garuda Purana*, 108

¹² See A. Berriedale Keith, *Classical Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 32-33, 42

¹³ See W. G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna*, pp. 88-89

¹⁴ See R. V. I, 167, 4; I, 124, 7; IV, 5, 5

¹⁵ See *Therigatha* XXXIX; XXVI; XXII; LXVI

I. B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism*, pp. 184 ff.

¹⁶ *Arthashastra*, pp. 136 ff

aware of her uses for the state in the matter of espionage and diplomacy.¹⁷ Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* naturally devotes a large part of its attention to the courtesan and her art and his man about town is sophisticated enough to accept the pleasure of her company as legitimate happiness. As Keith puts it "the luxury of polygamy did not suffice such a man; he is allowed to enjoy the society of courtesans, and in them, as in Athens, he finds the intellectual interests which are denied to his legitimate wives. With them and the more refined and cultured of the band of hangers-on, high and low, with whom he is surrounded, he can indulge in the pleasures of the discussion of literature, and appreciate the fine efforts of the poets and dramatists."¹⁸ During the time of the Islamic impact the institution of the harem came to be firmly established, the size of the harem being an index of status and prestige in many instances. The Slave kings and their successors, the Khiljis and Tughlaqs maintained large harems; so did the Bahamanis and the Deccan Sultans¹⁹ and Vijayanagara kings.²⁰ Akbar had one of the largest harems in Indian history.²¹ In the society of the 18th and 19th centuries the positive ideal of refined society was "female beauty, woman's life, woman's love, woman's dress, woman's beauty, these are the themes continuously reflected in love lyrics, in descriptions resembling the *Ars Amatoria* of Ovidus or the poems of Pope or Dryden, in *Holi* and *Basant* songs, in the *Ragmalas* and *Nayika* paintings, the erotic and sentimental romances, the fictitious portraits of sultanas, begums and ranis."²² In this age "it was the dancer, the singer, the courtesan who monopolized the heart and fancy". This may have been a reflection of the "hopeless political and economic decay" characterizing the "brilliant, refined and sweet culture of the courts".²³

If the *Kamasutra* epitomized the popular tradition of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 409 ff

¹⁸ A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 285

¹⁹ See Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, p. 70

²⁰ T. V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life Under Vijayanagara*, p. 100

²¹ See Vincent A. Smith, *Akbar, The Great Moghul*

²² H. Goetz, *The Crisis of Indian Civilization in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, p. 19

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21

conscious and deliberate delight in pleasures of the senses towering above it stood the spirit of the hieratic tradition which frowned upon such motley company as that of the singer, the dancer, the player of musical instruments and the courtesan. The law books would not admit the actor or the courtesan as a proper witness in a lawsuit and Manu classes the courtesans with thieves and blackmailers while another source maintains that the murderer of a prostitute commits no sin and does not deserve any punishment by law!²⁴ The condemnation of the fine arts of dramatics, music and other creative arts as socially inferior led to their inevitable decline and this was the penalty paid by the popular arts for the supremacy of priestly tradition.

But if the spirit was ever willing to soar higher and higher the flesh could not be ignored. And it is in this dichotomy that the peculiar development of Indian thought is best seen. We have referred to the two levels of awareness in thinking about the world namely, the ordinary and the extraordinary and the interpenetration of the two. The most decisive example of this system of thought is the inclusion of kama as an end as worthy as artha or dharma. The mystery of life is a comprehensive mystery which cannot be adequately understood only in spiritual terms for in that mystery the dichotomy between the spirit and flesh becomes resolved into a larger unity of being and becoming. From this point of view there seems nothing odd in the sculptures illustrating the *Kumashastra* on the walls of a temple at Khajuraho in Orissa. The Brahmanical priest may frown upon sex but outside of the priestly circles arose other and divergent views as embodied in the *Tantras* where the mystery of sex came to be reckoned as a part and parcel of the larger mystery of Being. Pleasure thus came to be viewed as of significance not as pleasure *per se* but more as a part of a composite and compulsive spiritual process.

III

It must not be supposed that life in India was completely cast in the mould reflected in the priestly writings. The life depicted in sacred, legal and classical Sanskrit literature was but one aspect which was preoccupied with the thoughts and actions of priests,

²⁴ *Gautamadharmashastra*, XXII, 27

the nobility and the other privileged classes. The life of the common people displayed other thoughts. Megasthenes, the Greek ~~envoy~~ at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, noticed that "Indians love finery and ornament. Their robes are worked in gold and ornamented with precious stones, and they wear also flowered garments made of the finest muslin."²⁵ Hiuen Tsiang says of the people of Kanauj that their clothing was "ornamented and bright-shining".²⁶ Vatsyayana describes in detail the daily life of a citizen. Especially interesting is the attention shown to cosmetics and articles of toilet. An ointment of fine sandalwood paste was used for the body and garments were smoked in incense; garlands were worn on the head and round the neck. Eyes were coloured with collyrium and lips were reddened with betel with a deepening given by red dye made from lac. Spiced betel leaf was chewed to perfume the mouth and then he (the citizen) went out on his business. Food was rich and there was no aversion to the use of liquor which, however, was forbidden to Brahmanas by the lawbooks. Meat-eating was also common though there was developing a growing vegetarianism. Among the festivals which were occasions of considerable joy and merry-making the most prominent were the spring and other festivals associated with religious observances. And then there were the picnics and outings. There was the *samaja* at which there was music, recitation of poetry and dancing; the *goshti* gave opportunities for informed conversation on literary and artistic subjects; the *apanaka* or the drinking parties and the garden parties and the *samasyakrida* which witnessed conviviality and sport.²⁷ Al Biruni also refers to a number of festivals like the spring festival and the full moon day festivals. He mentions the festival of lights which even today is the biggest festival in India.²⁸

Good food, drink, pleasant and charming company, fine clothes and perfumes, ornaments and garlands were thus parts of the process of the pursuit of pleasure. These were valued in themselves and, in spite of the scoffings of those who insisted on the primacy of the values of the other world over the demands of this,

²⁵ R. C. Majumdar and A. D. Pusalkar (Edrs), *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. II, The Age of Imperial Unity, p. 574

²⁶ S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, pp. 76-77

²⁷ H. Chakladar, *Social Life in Ancient India*, pp. 110-112

²⁸ E. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, II, pp. 178 ff

the concept of pleasure continued to play a vital role in Indian thinking. The only limitations placed on it were those of wealth. We have seen in the preceding chapter that the masses of the people of India, as elsewhere, have often been poor. Conditions of poverty led to an over stressing of the values of the other world over the joys of this and in this context the concept of *astha* was restricted in its development. The same conditions characterized the development of the concept of pleasure. But the evidence is there that this concept played a vital role in Indian history. Chandragupta enjoyed hunting and his grandson did the same until his conversion to Buddhism. In the Mahabharata there are numerous references to the chase, its joys and the danger of addiction to it. Gambling is the subject of quite a few Vedic hymns²⁹ and it continued to attract people throughout the ages. In Mughal times some new festivals like the *Nauroz* and the emperor's birthday were introduced. The Mughal grandees enjoyed themselves to the fullest extent³⁰—Samudra Gupta took as much interest in music and poetry as in the art of war and conquest³¹—and a well-balanced life always had equal place for the joys of the senses and the intellect as those of the spirit.

IV

But it is in literature that the development of the aesthetic ideal is shown in the most marked manner. Bharata's *Natyashastra* and the large number of works on architecture, painting, music and poetry show the vitality of the aesthetic ideal in India. Sanskrit literary theory worked out an elaborate and complex theory of aesthetic pleasure. The basis of this theory was *rasa*. An emotion is "recognised as a *rasa* if it is a sufficiently permanent major instinct of man, if it is capable of being developed and delineated to its climax with its attendant and accessory feelings and if there are men of that temperament to feel imaginative emotional sympathy at the presentation of that *rasa*".³² *Rasa* is "Ideal Beauty", a "tincture, essence, flavour, aesthetic experience being

²⁹ *Rig Veda*, X, 34

³⁰ See Surendranath Sen, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, p. 247

³¹ R. C. Majumdar and A. S. Altekar, *A New History of the Indian People*, Vol. VI, *The Vakata-Gupta Age*, p. 155

³² V. Raghavan, *The Number of Rasas*, p. 17

described as the tasting of flavour".³³ It is a complex of determinants, consequents, moods and involuntary emotions.³⁴ The eight major rasas mentioned in the texts are *Shringara* (erotic sentiment), *Hasya* (ludicrous); *Karuna* (tragic), *Raudra* (terrible), *Vira* (heroic), *Bhayanaka* (fearsome), *Bibhatsa* (vulgar) and *Adbhuta* (miraculous). To this was added the ninth, *Shanta* (peaceful) probably by the Buddhists and Jains.³⁵ The underlying assumption of the theory of rasas is that the human mind shows eight or nine dominant moods related to fairly stable sentiments which could be developed into works of literature. Rasa makes itself manifest through *dhvani* which may be rendered as "overtone of meaning".³⁶ The purpose of art is to give delight and aesthetic experience is a "transformation not merely of feeling, but equally of undertaking. . .".³⁷ It demands intense activity on the part of the reader or spectator and requires certain preparation for the aesthetic experience. This preparation is the artistic discipline which is twofold. On the one hand there is the discipline of the artist who is exhorted to look upon his art as a kind of Yoga³⁸; on the other hand an aesthete is not so much reposed in the object of art itself as in the mind of the beholder which requires that, that mind must be ready to respond to a work of art and enjoy it in terms of a conscious aesthetic experience. There can be no generation of a Shanta Rasa, whether through a poem or a drama or a painting, if the spectators or readers have their minds attuned to the apprehension of the Raudra or terrible sentiment. Hence for this aesthetic experience to arise there must be an artist as well as a *rasika*. Such a theory postulates a distinct philosophy of pleasure which accepts the intrinsic worth and validity of pleasure as a part of life. In rigorously monastic circles like the Buddhist there could be no acceptance of pleasure *per se* and it is in this spirit that a rule lays it down that members of the Buddhist monastic orders shall not witness dances or listen to music or attend shows where instrumental music is played or puppet-shows and dramatic performances are presented. In the Brahmanical law books there

³³ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 47

³⁴ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, p. 36

³⁵ Raghavan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 21-24

³⁶ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 53

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50

³⁸ *Bhagavadgita*, II, 50

was a tendency to regard all artistic professions as degrading although there was no rigid rule forbidding the Brahmana from enjoying art as such.

V

The decline in the importance of the concept of pleasure was closely associated with the deepening of crises in Indian life. The first such crisis came when Buddhism and Jainism arose. This crisis was the result of the disintegration of the tribal world of Magadha with the advance of imperial ideas and institutions. The decline of Buddhism as an institutional force in the life of the masses in the country began almost after the decline of the Mauryas. The resurgence of Brahmanism, witnessed in the Gupta age, was a visible symbol of this decline. The great dramas of Kalidasa and others no doubt pay lip-service to the ascetical ideal, so firmly rooted in the sacerdotal mind, but the spirit is not necessarily of a far-reaching and persistent pessimism and renunciation. Kalidasa loved life in all its diverse aspects. He had a deep appreciation of pleasure arising as much out of a heroic life as from the observation of the beauties of nature and women. But the world of classical Sanskrit literature is essentially a world of the wealthy Kshatriya classes with their priests and religion, court life and conquests. We have seen in the preceding chapter how the life of the common people, even in the Golden Age, was difficult, oppressed as it was by incessant toil with increasingly diminishing returns of that toil. Then came the disintegration of political life and the consequent struggle for imperial hegemony among the Rashtrakutas, the Gurajara-Pratiharas and the Pala-Senas of Bengal with the Cholas, Chalukyas, Hoyasalas and Kakatiyas always hovering round the fringes of the maelstrom. The country was witnessing the tramp of large armies marching all over the land, and with the Islamic invasions hammering away at the settled pattern of life and creating newer classes of parasites to prey upon the productive classes, conditions of life worsened sharply. The economic consequences of internecine wars and external aggressions by the Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Mongols and Mughals made mere survival a full-time occupation wherein the concept of pleasure and its conscious enjoyment could have little place. The so-called Medieval period of Indian history shows

two distinct trends in thinking. One is concerned with progressive hardening of caste distinctions and increase in the disabilities of the lower castes. The other is the rise of the *Vedanta* philosophy. If Buddhism and Jainism were products of a deep crisis within the body of a disintegrating tribal society Vedanta was an offspring of the crisis operating in and cleaving into fragments the institution of ancient Indian imperial polity. True it was that during this period Buddhism almost disappeared from the surface of Indian life and Jainism became a small sect of only peripheral significance, but the spirit of asceticism remained and operated on ever enlarging levels. The Buddhist texts often speak of the utter futility of existence³⁹; the Dhammapada asks: "Why the joy and mirth when everything is ablaze?"⁴⁰ It calls upon man to recognize that the body is after all fragile like an earthen pot or ephemeral like a spot of foam on a wave⁴¹ and only fools consider life as being of long duration.⁴² It says when the self itself does not belong to the self how can one regard sons and wealth as one's own?⁴³ And finally comes the telling statement that possessions are the misery of man.⁴⁴ These sentiments are generally reflective of the great ascetical movement, they are the poetry of the ascetic temper which regards passions as variegated, sweet and charming; but they do vex the mind of man in diverse ways.⁴⁵ The crisis of imperial polity, whether potential or actual, also produced similar sentiments. Both the *Samkhyas* and *Vedantins* speak of the three ailments of human life namely, the misery of body and mind; misery arising out of perishable creatures and the misery arising out of actions of gods.⁴⁶ Shankara denounces the fools who are tied to sense-objects by the stout cord of attachment⁴⁷ and declares extreme aversion to all perishable things as *sine qua non* of salvation.⁴⁸ The concepts of *Nirvana* and *Brahman* may be of different metaphysical origins and levels but they express an almost identical spirit of crisis in social and economic terms. Max Weber attributes an anti-orgiastic origin to the ascetical movements in India. He observes that "the intensification of vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol developed out of the

³⁹ *Sutta Nipata*, 5

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 62

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 50

⁴⁷ *Vivekachudamani*, 45, 75

⁴⁰ *Dhammapada*, 146

⁴² *Ibid.*, 60

⁴⁴ *Sutta Nipata*, 34

⁴⁶ *Vakyavritti*, 3

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69

opposition to meat orgies; the very strong tabooing of adultery and the admonition to control the sexual impulse in general has similar anti-orgiastic roots. Anger and passion were here, as in China, taboo because of the belief in the demonical and diabolic origin of all emotions. The commandment of rigid cleanliness, especially in eating, stemmed from magical purity rules."⁴⁹ There may be some substance in such simplifications but they ignore the hard economic realities expressed through the changing patterns of thought and concept. And there is another aspect of this problem as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy seems to suggest. According to him "whereas in a secular society a man looks forward to an old age of comfort and economic independence, in this sacerdotal order he looks forward to becoming independent of economics and indifferent to comfort and discomfort."⁵⁰ This desire to become independent of economics may, in itself, be a reflection of the increasing failure or crisis of the prevalent system of economy wherein the state acted as a dis-incentive and social mores declared the most directly productive classes as merely hewers of wood and drawers of water, dis-enfranchised of their social rights and divested of their spiritual privileges. All human societies display the sporadic appearance of ascetical movements; what is characteristic of India is the persistence of the ascetical temper through the ages. It seems to lie and spread all around and if there are times of prosperity and progress it lies low beneath the surface only to erupt once again as soon as a crisis is around the corner.

VI

The world-view of the *Vedas* is one of joys of life; of obvious delight in its pleasures. The poets unabashedly pray for bumper harvests, large heads of cattle, a house full of children and a future filled with promise. Women, in that society, may not have enjoyed equality of status with men but nevertheless they suffered few of the disabilities and were subject to even fewer disparaging jibes characteristic of much of the later lucubrations. There are two views of women. On the one hand they are declared never

⁴⁹ Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 150

⁵⁰ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 29

to become impure⁵¹ and Manu exhorts that where women are honoured there the gods are happy.⁵² On the other hand it is said that there exists no evil greater than women⁵³ and that they are given to vain things.⁵⁴ It is not necessary to go into the details of the failings of and danger from women,⁵⁵ as many of our texts tell us. What is significant is that they are called an obstacle to the path of devotion and a hindrance to emancipation.⁵⁶ It may also be pointed out that around the beginning of the Christian Era women began to lose many of their spiritual and cultural rights consequent upon the withdrawal of the right to investiture with the sacred thread for which, in an earlier age, the women of the priestly, Kshatriya and Vaishya orders were eligible.⁵⁷ A. S. Altekar aptly sees in this trend an increasing influence of the Sannyasi school of thought which advocated renunciation and possessionlessness. He argues that many of these adverse and uncomplimentary remarks may be explained as an exhibition of masculine cynicism which appears also among other peoples in Europe and Asia alike. But, he adds, "it appears that some Hindu writers have painted the woman in very black colours, not so much because they believed in what they said, but because they were anxious to dissuade men from marriage and family life. Varahamihira expressly states that the Renunciation (*Samnyasa*) School was accustomed to decry women with the above end in view. Of course there were a few writers in this school too, who have taken a balanced view of the whole situation and given due praise to women for the invaluable assistance which they gave to their husbands in the realization of the temporal and spiritual goals of life. This, for instance, is the case with the author of the *Yogavasishtha*. Such thinkers were, however, in a small minority. As a rule, in order to induce men to adopt a life of renunciation, which they honestly believed to be essential for salvation, the writers of the Samnyasa School felt that they might indulge in hyperbolic language in describing the faults, drawbacks and vices of woman, who is the centre and attraction of family life for man."⁵⁸ This triumph of the Renuncia-

⁵¹ *Mahabharata*, XII, 165, 32

⁵² *Manavadharmashastra*, III, 55-59

⁵³ *Mahabharata*, XII, 213, 7

⁵⁴ *Shatapatha Brahmana*, III, 24, 6

⁵⁵ *Vishnudharmashastra*, VII, 10; *Devi Bhagavata*, 1, 5, 83

⁵⁶ *Brahmavaivartaprakritikhanda*, 16, 52-60

⁵⁷ A. S. Altekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, p. 240

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 388

tion School not only affected the status of women but also profoundly altered the relative importance of the whole concept of pleasure. G. S. Ghurye argues that Indian culture "non-Buddhist, and non-Jain may be said to be the only culture which has acclaimed two ideal types, either as alternatives or as complementaries, from very early in its history till to-day."⁵⁹ These two types according to him are (a) the life-long celibate leading a life of renunciation without ever entering that of a householder and (b) the ideal type of the disinterested householder performing all the ordained duties of his life and station in it in the spirit of renunciation and devotion to God as enunciated in the *Bhagavadgita*. Later in this work we will have occasion to go into a detailed analysis of the concept of renunciation and its effects on the social history of India. It will be, hence, more pertinent for our purpose to dilate upon the ideal type of the householder referred to above as it is the householder who, more than any one else, is most directly involved in worldly life and its pleasures and pains.

Of the four stages of life that of the householder is frequently praised. When Yudhishthira, eldest of the Pandava brothers, became disgusted with the cares and vexations of the world and set out to seek renunciation he was dissuaded from doing so by his brothers and the sage, Dvaipayana Vyasa, on the plea that the highest duty of man lies in living the full life of the householder in the spirit of its dharma.⁶⁰ It is further pointed out that it is only in the stage of a householder that it is possible for man to fulfil as many as three of the four ideals of life simultaneously. These ideals are dharma, artha and kama. Manu points out that all stages gather their support from that of a householder who is the superior of all.⁶¹ In this connection Prabhu argues that the high value associated with the life of a householder indicates the importance of social values in Hindu thinking and is as such indicative of the positivist trend in that thinking.⁶² But there is always an insistence on non-involvement and detachment in all actions as the *Gita* emphasizes. The ideal man of the *Gita* goes beyond the two extremes of getting lost in the varied activities

⁵⁹ G. S. Ghurye, *The Indian Sadhus*, p. 5

⁶⁰ *Muhabharata*, Shantiparva, 23, 2

⁶¹ *Manavadharmashastra*, VI, 89, 90

⁶² P. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, pp. 93-96

of the world and the quietist withdrawing into the silence of the Absolute. He does this by acting without being necessarily interested in the results of that action.⁶³ Krishna says to Arjuna: "To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motives; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction. Fixed in yoga, do thy work, O Winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called yoga."⁶⁴ Such action is not purposeless action as Gandhi so aptly remarks.⁶⁵ Albert Schweitzer sees in this "the outward performance of actions in combination with inward renunciation of the world"⁶⁶ which is barely supported by evidence from the Gita itself where at another place yoga is explained as skill in action which can scarcely be possible with some higher form of involvement of the actor in his action.⁶⁷ But there is no need for us to enter the metaphysical controversy of the inherent superiority of world and life-affirmation over word and life-negation. The point at issue is whether it is possible to argue that the concept of yoga effectively influenced the concept of pleasure. The evidence seems to suggest an answer in the affirmative. The aim of yoga is to create a sense of complete detachment and equivalence (*samatva*) whereas the concept of pleasure involves a deliberate participation by man in the activities of the world of the senses with a view to derive as much pleasure for himself from it as possible. And hence even if it is possible to point up two alternate ideal types the ascetic and the householder—as Ghurye has done—it is worth noting that the ascetical concept casts its shadow even over the householder and his life. The ideal of a *rasika*, necessary for the awakening of a sense of beauty and joy in it, was developed in great detail by the Sanskrit aesthetic theorists. This theory demanded an active participation of the spectator or reader in the evocation of creative beauty in a work of plastic art or literature. But as against this there also arose the theory of *alamkara* and *riti*, ornament or figures and style or composition, regarded as essential elements in art. In these theories the

⁶³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 72

⁶⁴ *Bhagavadgita*, II, 47-48; Radhakrishnan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 119-130

⁶⁵ M. K. Gandhi, *The Gospel of Selfless Action*, p. 161

⁶⁶ A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, p. 188

⁶⁷ *Bhagavadgita*, II, 50

main emphasis is on "aesthetic surfaces which are significant only as sources of sensation" a position which could be maintained only from the standpoint of "naive realism which underlies a strictly monastic prejudice against the world".⁶⁸

Our examination of the development of the concept of pleasure and the influences working on it has revealed two distinct conditions. One is that pleasure as a concept begins to develop at a fairly early period and becomes a vital force to a point where it gets accepted in the larger scheme of the four ideals of life. Opposing this development is the concept of renunciation and non-acquisition stemming out of recurring crises in the body of Indian society. The first crisis may be ascribed to the break up of tribal societies, a process which went on from the sixth century B.C. to the rise of the Maurya empire in 324 B.C. This was the period of the rise of the great ascetical movements of Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivikism. These ascetical movements were challenged by the Bhakti cult and the resurgence of the Vedic religion followed by the establishment of the Puranic form of Hinduism. The second great crisis was the crisis of imperial polity which began from the time of the Hun invasions in the 6th century A.D. and continued until practically the time of Akbar in the middle of the 16th century. The ascetical movements thrown up by this crisis made themselves manifest as much in the Vedanta as in the Tantra. As against these ascetical movements there arose the great theistic non-ascetical movements symbolized in the rise of sects like those of Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak and the saint poets of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. These theistic movements, like the earlier Bhakti cult following the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, though not themselves strictly ascetical in the sense of being Sannyasi movements, assimilated the concept of detachment from the world, and transcendence of the world through single-minded devotion to the Deity, were opposed to the concept of pleasure in life or kama. The external conditions of the large masses of the people in the country through a major part of their history were such as to make life a difficult economic proposition. An expensive state controlled by the Kshatriya and the Brahmana, neither of whom played any direct role in the creation of wealth, wars, invasions and revolutions tended to support the concepts of detachment and non-acquisitiveness which were further enforced

⁶⁸ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, p. 54

by frequent intrusions of the ascetical ideal in all spheres of thought. The sacerdotal domination of Indian thought made it difficult for secularism to rise as a significant force and in the absence of this force the concept of pleasure was always at a disadvantage. When the concept of power as an economic and political concept failed it tended to acquire magical, mystical and sacerdotal overtones which aimed at transcending the world instead of directly winning it and enjoying its good things. Where the state is described as the swallower of the Vaishya, and the Shudra is held to be the servant of another to be dispossessed at will and slain at will, it is natural that considerations other than mere economic or hedonistic would enter in the final evaluation of the joys and sorrows of the world. A philosophy of pleasure which showed some promise of development was thus diverted into a philosophy of non-acquisition which imposed differing norms on the different sections making up Indian society through the ages. Of the four ideals of life the highest was held to be moksha and the lowest that of kama the enjoyment of which was always to be governed by the rules of dharma. The primacy of spiritual values over all other things is undoubtedly a noble ideal but the reality which brought it forth and helped it reign supreme was one of recurrent social and economic crises.

With the beginning of the Western impact as pointed out elsewhere there began a revaluation of values. The concept of pleasure was viewed in more positivistic terms and there was a rediscovery of some of the aesthetic theories which characterized Indian thought in the earlier ages. The criteria of success were not entirely changed for the man who renounces is still held to be a great man, greater than one who has no such dramatic sacrifices of material wealth and its pleasures to show. The ascetical temper still exists but it is now tempered with more positive and worldly considerations. The liberation of the arts from the thralldom of social stigma which existed in the earlier ages has helped create an attitude of positive pleasure in the joy of life as expressed through literature, drama and the arts. In times of old the tendency was to look upon kama as a necessary evil; today the trend is to question whether it is evil *per se*.

CHAPTER FIVE

KARMA AND PUNARJANMA

Deeds and Rewards

Perhaps no other single concept has had such a profound and far-reaching influence on Indian thinking as the concept of karma. Ever since it was first formulated in the *Upanishads* it has become a corner-stone not only of Hindu religion and philosophy but also much of its social theory. Buddhism and Jainism, as forms of revolt against the sacerdotalism and mysticism of the Vedic tradition have had occasion to reject the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmanical ritualism but both these creeds unreservedly accepted the law of karma. It is karma that gives a certain unity of thought to the three creeds of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and makes of them a characteristic expression of the Indic temper. Through the ages karma has held its ground and has influenced countless generations in thought and deed. If at its lowest level of comprehension it has resulted in fatalism at its highest, karma is a striking attempt at making order out of the diverse and confusing manifestations of the world. The concept of liberation, Moksha, which is the fourth ideal of life, cannot become fully intelligible without a proper understanding of the law of karma and its working in the allied concept of rebirth. The peculiar development of the theory of social classes manifest in the concept of varna and ashrama derives its ethical foundation in the doctrine of karma which thus becomes a great sociological force moulding the social and economic forces operating within the body of Indian society through the centuries. So universal has been its hold that it has been the basis of popular philosophy seeping down to the common level. The common Indian may not be familiar with the metaphysical subtleties of the various forms of the Vedanta but he surely has a basic comprehension of what karma means and how it enters in the scheme of his life. If dharma signifies what ought to be, karma explains what is and predicts what an individual can make of his life. Just as dharma relates to almost every single phase of the life of an

individual and the society within which he has his being and becoming, karma moulds the pattern of his individual and social action throughout his life. We will, therefore, undertake an analysis of the concept of karma in its historical context and sociological implications.

II

It was towards the end of the Vedic period (*circa* 700 B.C.) that the theory of karma came to be formulated in all its essentials. The *Rig Veda* develops the concept of *Rita* and this implies the existence of an unvarying cosmic law which holds supreme everywhere in the universe. It is the "course of things" whose foundations are "firm-seated"; to it belong "the vast deep earth and heaven"; even the mighty gods like Mitra and Varuna obtain their power through the Law; everything moves according to its dictates and the gods are its upholders.¹ The original meaning of the word may have been "straight, direct" and etymologically it is obviously related to the word "rite".² Max Muller defined it as the "straight line, which in spite of many momentary deviations, was discovered to run through the whole realm of nature. We call that rita, that straight, direct or right line, when we apply it in a more general sense, the Law of Nature; and when we apply it to the moral world, we try to express the same idea again by speaking of the Moral Law, the law on which our life is founded, the eternal Law of Right and Reason, or, it may be, that which makes for righteousness, both within us and without."³ It is a law "that underlies everything, a law in which we may trust, whatever befall, a law which speaks within us with the divine voice of conscience, and tells us 'this is rite', 'this is right', 'this is true', whatever the statutes of our ancestors, or even the voices of our bright gods, may say to the contrary."⁴ Its sociological aspects were pointed out by Rudolf Otto who derives the word from the root *Ar* which means to arrange, to order, to regulate and "that it really means the regulated, the ordered. And not so much the state of order and the process,

¹ See *Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 25-7

² Max Muller, *India, What It can teach us*, p. 66

³ Max Muller, *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 243-55

⁴ Max Muller, *India, What It can teach us*, p. 243

as the principle behind this state and the power that holds and regulates the process. Rita is a binding power, constraining to order. It was to be found also in social life, in the life of the clan, of the tribe and of the family. The binding order of morals, customs, laws and manners in the constitution of the social classes and of the labour-communities, in compacts and oaths, in marriage, in the relations of individuals, of clans and tribes, in public law and in private conduct, was also rita, based upon rita. It appeared in social life as the continuation, the consequence and reflection of the cosmic binding order."⁵ It is significant that the opposite of rita, that is anrita, became the common word for falsehood and sin.

This was the highest concept in Rig Vedic philosophy. It postulated the firm belief that the universe was an orderly universe, that it was not subject to the blind whims and fancies of the gods, that the gods themselves were bound by the Supreme Law and were not arbitrary either in their intentions or their conduct. It was Varuna who was specially associated with the prevalence of the Cosmic Law⁶ and if this trend had continued the Vedic religion would have assumed a very different form and content than what it did later. This trend was, however, deflected and later submerged with the growth of ritualism in the cult of sacrifice which increasingly came to be looked upon as the powerful instrument which could secure desired benefits. When this happened the gods began to recede in the background and sacrifice became an end in itself replacing its old role as the means to an end which "was to secure the blessings of the gods." Rita then came to mean not so much the Grand Cosmic Law of morality but the correct order in the sacrificial ritual which was itself given a mechanistic interpretation. The religious ideas and attitudes of the *Brahmana* period which followed that of the *Rig Veda* "represent the intellectual activity of a sacerdotal caste which, by turning to account the religious instincts of a gifted and naturally devout race, had succeeded in transforming a primitive worship of the powers of nature into a highly artificial system of sacrificial ceremonies, and was ever intent on deepening and extending its hold on the minds of the people, by surrounding its own vocation with the halo of sanctity and divine inspiration. A

⁵ *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arien*, p. 96; See Mees, *Dharma and Society*, p. 10

⁶ Varuna called *Rtasya dharmā*

complicated ceremonial, requiring for its proper observance and consequent efficacy the ministrations of a highly trained priestly class, has ever been one of the most effective means of promoting 'hierarchical aspirations.'⁷ The development of the caste system paralleled the growing complexities of the sacrificial ritual. Sacrifice was now interpreted in cosmic and mystical terms not so much as a rite to be correctly performed, though of course this was highly important, but more as an abstract concept. Sacrifice was the basis of the universe, for, from it arose the world-order and on it depended the maintenance of everything that is. As the *Bhagavadgita* succinctly puts it: "In ancient days the Lord of creatures created men along with sacrifice and said 'By this shall ye bring forth and this shall be unto you that which will yield the milk of your desires' " and "from food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being and sacrifice is born of work."⁸ The glorification of the cult of sacrifice, however, could not go on indefinitely since it was bound to come to a dead end in the development of thought. That dead end was reached with the mystical interpretation of sacrifice which regarded the rite as a symbol of cosmic creation and recreation. It could promise the desired results if the rite was performed in strict accordance with the rules and ordinances down to the smallest details but it was not adequately capable of explaining how a particular situation arose. Its cosmogony was too limited and its theology too impersonal to appeal to the creative reflection. A new force was required to break the intellectual vicious circle and that force appeared in the speculations of the *Upanishads*.

III

It has been often suggested that the *Upanishads* show, on the one hand, the emergence of the Kshatriya element into the intellectual life of the people and on the other an assimilation of non-Aryan elements.⁹ Deussen observes that the leading ideas of the *Upanishads* may have originated among some Brahmana circles "but met with acceptance rather in Kshatriya circles than among Brahmanas, engrossed as the latter were in the ritual. It was only later on that they were adopted by the Brahmanas, and interwoven

⁷ Julius Eggeling, *The Shatapatha Brahmana*, S.B.E., XII, pp. ix-x

⁸ *Bhagavadgita*, III, 10, 14

with the ritual on the lines of allegorical interpretations."⁹ The *Upanishads* are characterized by bold and daring ideas such as atman and Brahman, the individual self and the cosmic self, karma, and rebirth. Their political and economic background may be discerned in conditions of incessant warfare pursued by the Aryans in their ruthless expansion into the heartland of Aryavarta; in an expanding economy in certain sectors but an economy that was causing severe strains in other areas of life. In them we no longer find the child-like self-assurance of the early Aryans; along with a certain intellectual maturity we also espy a growing weariness with the world of senses, of appearances and historical realities. Therein are juxtaposed two opposing attitudes. One is of a formal acceptance of the Vedic tradition and indications for its ultimate fulfilment in intellectual terms. The other is one of open scepticism indicating a spirit of dissatisfaction with the old ideas and concepts found to be totally inadequate to meet the emerging situation. Though there is no open defiance of reason there seems to be a persistent desire to transcend reason rather than subserve it and the method of *neti* (not-ism) emphasizes the mystical nature of the Absolute. Now mysticism, as well as a predominant belief in occultism, may be the result of a tendency to turn away from reason and science. At two distinct points we see the alternate emergence of mysticism and occultism in Indian history of the ancient period. One is the period which gave birth to the *Upanishads* and the other which made astronomy degenerate into astrology. The second period may reasonably be placed after the break up of imperial polity witnessed after the exit of the imperial Guptas from the stage of history. Suspicion of reason has always been present at all stages in the history of the human race and India is no exception to this. But this attitude is generally dormant and bursts into intense activity primarily during the times when social and economic crises are witnessed. The very fact of a group like the Kshatriyas, which was vested with political and economic power, becoming receptive to ideas of other-worldliness is an indication of a social crisis. And it seems reasonable to argue that the doctrine of karma first arose as a philosophy of social crisis.

There is scarcely any awareness of the existence of the twin concepts of karma and rebirth in the *Rig Veda*. The book refers to the Abode of the Gods and the Abode of the Ancestors

⁹ P. Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 8

(*Devayana* and *Pitriyana*) as the places where the virtuous reside after they relinquish the earthly abode. There is also a reference to the nether world but as yet an elaborate scheme of heavens and hells has not arisen. The doctrine of karma cuts across the lines of the concepts of Heaven and the Abode of the Ancestors. Keith notes that the vedic technical term *Ishtapurta* may be regarded as a distinct precursor of the later theory of karma.¹⁰ It is also possible to hold that as in the case of dharma¹¹ the theory of the rita may also have been an anticipation of the law of karma.¹² It is in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* that the earliest clear formulation of the twin theory of karma and rebirth can be seen. It is stated there that "Every man is born in the world fashioned by himself".¹³ The old *Upanishads* go deeper into the implications of this. One of them says "One goes into the womb of a mother, Becoming incarnate in bodily form; Another enters into a plant, Each according to his deeds, according to his knowledge."¹⁴ Another states, "Man is a creature of will. According as he believes in this world, so will he be when he is departed."¹⁵ The *Chandogya Upanishad* says: "Just as he acts, just as he behaves, so will he be born. He who does good will be born good, he who does evil will be born evil; he becomes holy by holy deeds, evil by evil. Therefore, in truth it is said, Man is altogether and throughout composed of desire (*kama*), in proportion to his desire so is his discretion (*kratu*) in proportion to his discretion so he performs acts (*karma*)."¹⁶ And then there is the celebrated statement: "As a goldsmith taking a piece of gold forms another shape with it, more new and agreeable, so throwing off this body and obtaining that state of knowledge, the soul forms a shape which is more new and agreeably suited to the world."¹⁷ And "as a caterpillar which has wriggled to the top of a blade of grass draws itself over to a new blade, so does the man after he has put aside his body draw himself over to a new existence."¹⁸ Once the theory of

¹⁰ A. B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, I, p. 250; II, p. 478

¹¹ See Mees, *op. cit.*, p. 10

¹² Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 109

¹³ *Shatapatha Brahmana*, VI, 2, 2, 27

¹⁴ *Kathakopanishad*, V, 7

¹⁵ *Chandogyopanishad*, III, 14, 1

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 14, 1; *Brihadaranyakopanishad*, III, 2, 13

¹⁷ *Brih.* IV, 4, 4; I, 5, 16; *Chan.* V, 10, 2

¹⁸ *Brih.* IV, 4, 3; VI, 2; *Chan.* V, 3, 10

karma and rebirth was formulated it was not difficult to spell out its sociological implications which is already accomplished in some of the older *Upanishads* where it is suggested that a man's birth, in a despised caste like the *Chandala* may be due to his performance of evil deeds in a past existence.¹⁹

The formulation of the concept of karma and rebirth, revolutionized the older Vedic speculation. The Vedic theology and cosmology were not altogether rejected. What was accomplished was that some entirely new premises were added on to the older theories. In this arises the theory of "double retribution, once by reward and punishment in the other world, and again by rebirth upon earth. This feature is evidently primitive, and is nothing more than a combination of the traditional future recompense found in the Veda with the novel recompense of the transmigration doctrine".²⁰ The motive behind the formulation of the transmigration doctrine, according to Deussen, is to explain the great moral difference of character, existing from birth to birth and this is done on the hypothesis "that a man has already existed once before his birth, and that his inborn character is the fruit and consequence of his previous action".²¹ In the earlier phases of thought there came to be postulated three possible destinies for man after death. One was the Abode of the gods, the other was the Abode of the ancestors and the third was the Moon. Gradually the Abode of the ancestors lost its importance and significance and the third place came to be designated as rebirth here in this world. Then began the attempt to gather the loose ends of contradictions and the theory was worked out that "all who depart from this world go without exception to the moon" where their knowledge is put to test and accordingly they go either by the abode of the gods which leads to the Brahman without return or they enter upon a new birth "whether as a worm or a fly or a fish or a bird or a lion or a boar or a serpent or a tiger or a man, or as something else".²² Thus do two ideas merge in the doctrine of transmigration. It is now argued that the body is built out of two substrata that of elements (*bhutashtaya*) and an ethical substratum (*karmashtaya*) "which determines the character of the new body and life" and is formed by the actions committed in the course of each life" and is therefore different for each soul and for each

¹⁹ *Chan.* V, 10, 7

²⁰ Deussen, *op. cit.*, p. 329

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 330

²² *Ibid.*, p. 337

life course".²³ The Vedic concept of redemption from sin through sacrifice came to be largely superseded by the law of karma in which began the twilight of the Vedic divinities.

In simple terms what the new theory implied was this. It stressed the doctrine of individual responsibility for the situation in which the individual found himself; that more than social forces his individual actions were responsible for his well-being or misfortune. And its associate doctrine of transmigration opened up a vista of innumerable lives through which an individual had to pass before his quest for perfection was completed. At one stroke as it were, it dethroned the old vedic gods from their mighty eminence as arbiters of human destiny and enthroned man as the maker of his own fate. Karma thus became a theory of value in the ethical and spiritual areas of life which implication was worked out in some detail by the Buddhists in their attack on the caste system itself. This is reflected in the Buddha's observation that "not by birth does a man become an outcaste; nor by birth alone does he become a Brahmana; it is by deeds that a man becomes an outcaste and also by deeds alone can a man be called a Brahmana."²⁴ And "do not ask what a man's caste is but examine his conduct for even from lowly wood can the sacred fire be produced."²⁵ Karma, then, tended to cut across the bonds of family, clan, tribe and kingdom as it postulated a creed that held valid for all men irrespective of their other connections. It attempted to posit a system of ethics of universal application. But it had two sides. If it was a message of hope for man, who by the sheer dint of his own personal exertion could make his own destiny, it also contained within itself an explanation of his present plight based on the nature of his past. Karma, thus, looks both ways; it glances back into the past and it also looks forward to a bright future. Many a time in practice there was only a partial application of the theory where it was pressed into service to explain the past and thus became merged with a theory of fatalism. Karma said as a man sows, so shall he reap; but was also made to say, as a man reaps so he must have sown. What the implications of this were we will see later.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 265

²⁴ *Suttanipata*, Vasalasutta, 136 ²⁵ *Ibid.*

IV

Once the theory was presented it only remained for the later ages to work out in full all of its implications. Though the structure of old Vedic thought tended to become obsolete it was preserved for the simple reason that the Vedic tradition had already become too sacred to be easily repudiated. It thus came to pass that along with karma several other theories about the fate of man after death came to be accepted. This is particularly the case with the cult of the ancestors as exemplified in the *Shradhha* (funeral oblations) ritual. The concept of heaven and hell also continued to hold sway though in the context of karma and rebirth it was hardly tenable. But the theory represented a remarkable advance in thought and became the most outstanding characteristic concept for later ages to comment upon.

The later texts more or less rest content with an elaboration of the Upanishadic theory of karma. Thus the *Mahabharata* states: "A creature is bound by deeds (karma); he is liberated by knowledge (*vidya*); by knowledge he becomes eternal, imperceptible and undecaying. Some men of little understanding eulogize karma, so they embrace with delight the entanglements of corporeal existence; but those who have achieved a perfect comprehension of Dharma do not commend karma as a person drinking from a river thinks little of a well."²⁶ And "one's own efforts are like the seed, fate (*daiva*) is the soil and the harvest is the union of the two."²⁷ Further, "With eye or thought or voice or deed, whatever kind of act one performs, one receives that kind of act in return."²⁸ Karma is something that an individual does and is rewarded for and no man can inherit the good or evil act of another.²⁹ But this attitude came to be modified later when the theory of transference of karma came to occupy a significant place in religious thought. The *Mahabharata* believes in the force of karma or the fatality of the act and this fatalistic interpretation assumes some importance in the popular understanding of the doctrine of karma.³⁰

In the *Bhagavadgita* (circa 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 ?) Krishna attempts a full philosophical exposition of the doctrine of karma.

²⁶ *Mahabharata*, XII, 8810 ff; See Shanti Parva, 240, 7

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Anusasanaparva, 6, 8

²⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 16, 22

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XII, 291, 22

³⁰ Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, I, p. 508

Karma, according to him is ubiquitous and eternal and it is not possible for any one not to perform some karma at every moment of life.³¹ It is the creative force that brings beings into existence³²; it is a condition, not a destiny and there are five factors involved in its completion. There is the *adhisthana*, "the basis or centre from which we work, *kartr*, or doer, *karana* or the instrumentation of nature, *cesta* or effort and *daiva* or fate. The last is the power or powers other than human, the cosmic principle which stands behind, modifying the work and disposing of its fruits in the shape of act and its reward."³³ Karma is further described as of three kinds *karma* that binds, *vikrama* which is evil and *akarma* that is non-binding karma.³⁴ Since it is not possible for a man not to perform karma the best that he can do is to perform it without any desire for its fruits. When he acts in this wise the karma that he performs ceases to bind him to existence.³⁵ In this obviously there is a reference to the *karmamarga* the path of works which, in contradistinction with the other two paths namely, those of knowledge (*jnyana*) and devotion (*Bhakti*) appealed to the minds of many. The path of works is the way of the ritual which had behind it the enormous weight of the sanctity of the Vedic tradition. And the element of *daiva* had to be brought in to reconcile karma to theism under which alone could operate the concept of *prasada* or divine grace. This reconciliation between the "iron" law of karma and the element of divine grace was achieved through the theory of *adhikara* or capability which was a matter of individual exertion. The *Gita* thus makes of karma a gospel of action and tries to stem the advance of the tide of renunciation beating on the minds of men on all sides. It works out to the fullest extent the sociological implications of the theory of karma through the concept of *guna* and *karma*. Krishna says "The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of quality and work."³⁶ S. Radhakrishnan explains that "the emphasis is on *guna* (aptitude) and *karma* (function) and not *jati* (birth). The *varna* or the order to which we belong is independent of sex, birth or breeding. A class determined by temperament and vocation is not a caste determined by birth and heredity.

³¹ *Bhagavadgita*, III, 5

³² *Ibid.*, VIII, 3

³³ Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 48

³⁴ *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 17

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 47

³⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 13; See S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 160

According to the *Mahabharata* the whole world was originally of one class but later it became divided into four divisions on account of the specific duties. Even the distinction between caste and outcaste is artificial and unspiritual."³⁷ It may be argued that the *Bhagavadgita* gives divine sanction to a social system full of iniquities like the caste system. But it must be remembered that by the time the *Gita* came to be composed and incorporated into the *Mahabharata* the caste system had already become a rigidly hierarchical system which attempted to perpetuate the rule of the Kshatriya and the Brahmana by enabling them to live on the labours of the Vaishya and the Shudra. In such a context the doctrine of the *Gita* is one of liberalism for the work tries, at least theoretically, to keep open the possibility of social and spiritual advancement to the lower orders of society by basing status on guna (ability) and karma (efforts) rather than on mere birth. It tried to effect the release of the doctrine of karma from the shackles of an inexorable blind fate which may ordain some to a life of perpetual toil and low social status and others to a life of luxury and opulence without the attendant necessity of being involved in directly productive work. In this doctrine of guna and karma as the basis of social evaluation the position of the *Gita* is very similar to that of Gautama, the Buddha whose statements have been quoted earlier in this context.

The *Gita* also introduces a striking new concept in the development of the theory of karma. Krishna calls upon Arjuna to act and perform his ordained duty (niyata karma) appropriate to his role and station in life. This was necessary since the atmosphere was generally filled with ideas of withdrawal from the world as symbolized in the great ascetical movements of Buddhism and Jainism. There was a very real threat of dislocation in the nature and performance of social functions so necessary for the smooth development of society. If society had to function normally the various elements that went into its making must continue to do their respective duties for philosophers must face problems rather than run away from them and soldiers must fight in defence of the cherished ideals and institutions of society, that those engaged in directly productive tasks might perform their duties appropriate to their situation in life.³⁸ But this karma must be performed in the spirit of yoga that is "steadfast in inner composure" which is

³⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-61

³⁸ *Bhagavadgita*, III, 8

another name for samatva that is "conquest of anger, sensitiveness, pride and ambition".³⁹ When karma is performed in this wise it ceases to bind and even helps an individual on on the path of perfection.

In the *Dharmashastras* the concept of hell finally comes to be accommodated into the framework of the theory of karma. Manu declares that karma is indestructible⁴⁰ and that hell can, in certain contexts, take the place of metempsychosis.⁴¹ In the Buddhist *Dhammapada* the inexorability of the doctrine of karma is developed at great length. It says that the sinner is overwhelmed by his own sins;⁴² that the sins committed by one defile oneself just as the good deeds purify one⁴³; that one suffers the consequences of one's actions with a tearful face later⁴⁴; that sins follow a fool like an ash-covered fire⁴⁵; a sinner grieves here as well as in the next world.⁴⁶ This is an indication that one is liable to suffer for one's acts in this very world and it is not necessary to wait for the next world for karma to produce its own results. Karma is described as one's own kinsman for good karma welcomes the departed into the next world just as relations and kinsmen welcome a man who has returned from a long journey safely.⁴⁷ Karma is cumulative and as such one must not think the less of small acts; small acts accumulate into mighty karma just as a pitcher is filled even by small drops of water.⁴⁸ There is no place in the whole universe, whether in the sky or in the depths of the ocean or in the caverns of mountains, where one can find escape from one's karma which means that karma holds the whole world within its mysterious grip.⁴⁹ The best policy, therefore, says the *Dhammapada*, is to avoid the performance of sin⁵⁰ and the teachings of the Buddhas may be summarized in the avoidance of all sins, the acquisition of merit and the purification of one's mind.⁵¹ Though the Buddhists did not accept the concept of soul and adopted an indeterminate attitude towards divinity and its role in human affairs they did accept the doctrine of transmigration. It is not necessary for us to go into the metaphysical subtleties which explain trans-

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 48; S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 120

⁴⁰ *Manavadharmashastra*, XI, 46; *Gautamadharmashastra*, XIX, 5

⁴¹ *Manavadharmashastra*, XII, 18 & 22 ⁴² *Dhammapada*, 161

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 165 ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 67 ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 71 ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 219-20 ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 121 ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 127

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 333 ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 183

migration without recourse to a soul but the point to be noted is that the Buddhists in their rejection of soul associate the roles of cause and effect into the single concept of karma. It is karma that is the cause of rebirth and, in a certain sense, it is also karma that is made manifest in succeeding lives. The Jainas regard karma as a sort of subtle matter flowing in through the organs of sense and becoming the cause of bondage of the soul.⁵² This is somewhat analogous to the view that guilt is something material and can be expiated through the performance of rites and ceremonies and by bathing in sacred streams and by undertaking pilgrimages. Kalidasa, (5th century A.D. ?) the great Sanskrit poet, takes the concepts of karma and rebirth for granted and attempts to show their grand delineation through some of his most outstanding characters.⁵³ The implications of these theories for classical Sanskrit literature are brought out by Keith in the following words: "The actions and status of man in any existence depend upon no accident; these are essentially the working out of deeds done in a previous birth, and these again are explained by yet earlier actions from time without beginning. Indian drama is thus deprived of motif which is invaluable to Greek tragedy, and everywhere provides a deep and profound tragic element, the intervention of forces beyond control or calculation in the affairs of man, confronting his mind with obstacles upon which the greatest intellect and the most determined will are shattered. A conception of this kind would deprive the working of the law of the act of all validity and, however much in popular ideas, the inexorable character of the act might be obscured by notions of an age before the evolution of the belief of the inevitable operation of the act, in the deliberate form of expression in drama this principle could not be forgotten. We lose therefore the spectacle of the good man striving in vain against an inexorable doom; we lose even the wicked man whose power of intellect and will make us admire him, even though we welcome his defeat. The wicked man who perishes is merely, in the view of the Sanskrit drama, a criminal undergoing punishment, for whose suffering we should feel no sympathy whatever; such a person is not a suitable hero for any drama and it is a mere reading of modern sentiment into ancient literature to treat Duryodhana in the *Urubhanga* as the hero of

⁵² See W. T. De Barry (Ed.) *Sources of Indian Tradition*, p. 50

⁵³ Upadhyaya, *India in Kalidasa*, pp. 358-59

the drama.”⁵⁴ It is somewhat of an oversimplification to argue that great tragedy can arise only if there is an operation of a blind and overpowering fate in the hands of which mere humans however good they may be, can struggle only in futility. The absence of great tragedies in Sanskrit literature must be more reasonably explained as a result of the persistent literary convention against pure tragedy rather than through the operation of the concept of karma.

That the concept of karma had great force in thoughts and deeds of men in all walks of life throughout the history of India is borne out by historical evidence. Asoka, for instance, speaks of karma and its effects on the life of an individual and exhorts his subjects to eschew evil and perform good actions.⁵⁵ He believed in the other world and the effect produced by virtue and sin on future life.⁵⁶ He says that he who performs good deeds accomplishes something difficult.⁵⁷ He also believed in heaven and hell which indicates that the old compromise between the doctrine of karma and belief in heaven and hell had become a common stock of Indian ideas on the subject.⁵⁸ Samuḍra Gupta likewise puts his faith in the other world on record on some of his coins which refer to him as one who by his good deeds wins heaven.⁵⁹ Hiuen Tsiang, who visited India during the time of Harsha (7th century A.D.) speaks that “they dread the retribution of another state of existence and make light of the things of the present world”.⁶⁰ Al Biruni, writing in the 11th century A.D. states that “The Hindus differ among themselves as to the definition of what is *action*. Some who make God the source of action consider him to be the universal cause; for as the existence of the agents derives from him, he is the cause of their action, and in consequence it is his own action coming into existence through their intermediation. Others do not derive action from God, but from other sources, considering them as the *particular causes* which in the last instance—according to external observation—produce the action in question.” He further says that they believe that “not one action of man shall be lost, not even the last of all; it shall

⁵⁴ A. B. Keith, *Sanskrit Dharma*, pp. 77-8 ⁵⁵ Pillar Edict, III

⁵⁶ Rock Edict, VI; also RE, X ⁵⁷ RE, V

⁵⁸ B. G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Asoka*, p. 69

⁵⁹ R. C. Majumdar and A. S. Altekar, *Vakataka-Gupta Age*, p. 157

⁶⁰ S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, p. 83

be brought to account after his good and bad actions have been balanced against each other. The retribution, however, is not according to the deed but according to the intention which a man had in doing it; and a man will receive his reward either in that form in which he lives on earth or in that form in which his soul will migrate or in a kind of intermediary state after he has left his shape and has not yet entered a new one."⁶¹ It is interesting to notice here that Al Biruni refers to the three distinct layers in the concept of karma as it had developed already in the Upanishadic age and which persisted throughout the history of that concept. Karma may find its retribution either in this very world or in hell or through rebirth where the doer suffers the effects of his action both in form and content strictly equal to the form and content of his own deeds performed with deliberate intent. In this context karma came to mean a theory of the conservation of moral energy which is indestructible.⁶² Tavernier and Bernier who visited India during the 17th century report that the karma and rebirth concepts were living ideas among the masses. Says Bernier: "The Hindoos believe in the transmigration of souls, and hold it illegal to kill or eat any animal." A little later, however, he gives a more rational explanation of the prevailing vegetarianism when he says that "It ought likewise to be observed that owing to the great deficiency of pasture land in India it is impossible to maintain large numbers of cattle; the whole perforce would soon disappear if animal food were eaten in anything like the proportion in which it is consumed in France and England and the country would thus remain uncultivated."⁶³ The facile generalization that the people of India tend to be vegetarians solely because of their religious beliefs is exposed in this interesting observation of the 17th century though it continues to pass muster for observational profundity even today. Bernier has exposed the hard economic necessity behind the conservation of cattle wealth which came to assume a religious conviction in course of time and was associated with the concepts of non-violence and transmigration. Tavernier observes that "it is one of the articles of belief of the idolators that the souls of men on leaving their bodies after death are presented to God, who, according to the life the owners have led,

⁶¹ Sachau, *Al Biruni's India*, pp. 30, 62

⁶² *Sutta Nipata*, 666

⁶³ Irving Brock (Ed.), *Travels in the Mughal Empire by Francis Bernier*, II, p. 33

allots them other bodies to inhabit, so that the same person is several times reborn into the world. And God sends the souls of men of evil life, degraded in their habits and plunged in all kinds of vices, after being separated from the bodies into the bodies of inferior animals such as asses, dogs, cats and others in order that they may perform penance for their crimes in these infamous prisons."⁶⁴ Earlier we referred to Upanishadic evidence indicating the possibility of a man being reborn either as a plant or as an animal and Tavernier's observation is significant inasmuch as it indicates how the belief had spread even down to the lowest levels of understanding. The Abbe J. A. Dubois, writing in the early decades of the 19th century argued that "at first the doctrine of metempsychosis appears to have been limited to the successive transmigrations of souls into various human bodies. Later on, however, it received a new expansion, viz. that the souls could migrate to the bodies of beasts and to all material objects." The Platonic philosophers, he points out restricted the scope of transmigration to the respective species to which the bodies before death belonged. But the Hindus, adds the Christian Cleric, having not had the benefit of being exposed to "enlightened men" have preserved the doctrine of metempsychosis in all its entirety.⁶⁵

The vitality of the concept of Karma and rebirth was such that it has persisted as an important element in Indian thinking through the centuries. This vitality must be explained in terms of something that is particularly satisfying in the concept which appeals so much to the thinkers and common people alike. What this appeal comprised we shall examine presently but first let us trace the historical modifications brought about in it at the very stage of inception of the concept.

V

There are three layers in this composite concept. The first is that of karma itself which enunciates the principle of the moral responsibility of man for his own deeds. The awareness of this moral responsibility was apparent even in the Rig Vedic age. The idea of rita has cosmic as well as moral implications and the

⁶⁴ W. Crooke (Ed), *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, II, p. 158 also see S. N. Sen (Ed), *Careri, Travels in India*, p. 254

⁶⁵ H. K. Beauchamp (Ed), *Hindu Manners etc.*, p. 561

moral aspect soon developed in the concept of karma. The other idea is that of transmigration which arose in the Upanishadic age, and as an idea this is older than the idea of hell.⁶⁶ E. Washburn Hopkins states that "the doctrine of metempsychosis, without ethical bearing, has no necessary connection with ante-natal action, and this, transmigration pure and simple, was an older belief than that in hell. Karma itself merely implies the fruit of action, and that fruit may in terms of metempsychosis or in terms of hell or of both." The view that hell alone punishes the sinner is older than the later Buddhistic interpretation of an individual as a "self-adjusting moral mechanism".⁶⁷ With the incorporation of the ideas of transmigration associated with karma and hell it was pointed out that when "hell and karma both punish a sinner, he is sent to hell first and is then handed over to the working of karma".⁶⁸ There was also the old idea of sin being regarded as something in the nature of a material which could be burnt by fire or otherwise expiated through the performance of expiatory ritual. A woman in the Buddhist *Therigatha* makes fun of a Brahmana hurrying to the sacred river for a bath to wash away his sins taunting him that if he were sure that sins could be washed away by the waters of the river he should be frightened at the possibility of his merit too being washed away by the self-same waters!⁶⁹ In that dialogue there is an obvious assumption on the part of the Brahmana that sin was some sort of a substance which could be cleansed by sacred waters. The ritual of purification of a house with the sprinkling of the waters of the Ganga practised by many even today is a survival of this concept of guilt or impurity thereof being considered as material. But the doctrine of karma "struck hard against the old belief in sacrifice, penance and repentance as destroyers of sin".⁷⁰ And strictly interpreted karma also vitiated the force of another concept which existed before it. "In its simplest forms it is the theory that man owes what he gets, not to his anterior self, but to the gods. What the gods arrange is, in any case, whether good or bad, the appointed lot; the arrangement, *viddhi*, is fate. If the gods bestow a share,

⁶⁶ See E. Washburn Hopkins, "Modification of the Karma Doctrine", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1906, p. 582, Note

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 582-3

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 583

⁶⁹ *Therigatha*, LXV; Horner, I. B., *op. cit.*, p. 181

⁷⁰ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 583

a *bhaga*, of good upon a man, that is his *bhagya*, luck, divinely appointed, *dista*. As divine, the cause is *daiva*, which later becomes fate, and is then looked upon as a blind power, necessity, chance, *hatha*. So radical a blow at karma as is given by this theory is formally repudiated in the words *bhagyam kurma*, 'luck is karma' or some equivalent denial."⁷¹ And though the concept of karma carried to its logical conclusion would indicate the necessity of denial of divine intervention in human affairs, a position the Buddhists logically adopted, the theistic streak in Indian thinking was too strong to be so easily submerged under the force of the concept of karma. What consequently happened then was that karma had to be reconciled with the demands of theism which was accomplished through the concept of *prasada* or divine grace so essential for salvation. The position then was that though karma was operative on the normal level, on the extraordinary level where alone salvation was possible, it was necessary for some agency not involved in karma to uplift a human soul from the vortex of karma. This divine agency was the power of *bhakti* which could secure *prasada* or divine grace. In this light it was argued that karma refers to existence whereas *prasada* has a bearing on deliverance from existence that is karma.

There also arose the theory of transference of karma so essential to the working of charity. Though in its literal interpretation karma is individual and the individual alone must reap its reward there were attempts made to explain certain phenomena like drought and famine and pestilence as results of a political institution like kingship. In the *Mahabharata*, for instance, it was the fault of the king that was responsible for natural calamities.⁷² In the *Dharmashastras* it is stated that the wife shares in the fruits of the husband's acts.⁷³ Now if the effect of guilt can be shared between the king and his subjects or a husband and a wife it should be equally possible to share the results of the good deeds of another. This extension of the concept of karma, whereby its extreme individualistic basis was modified, made room for charity and around the first two centuries B.C. we have inscriptional evidence of its wide application in the Buddhist community.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 584-5. ⁷² *Mahabharata*, XII, 90, 36

⁷³ See *Manavadharmashastra*, IX, 22, 30; V, 164

⁷⁴ B. G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Asoka*, pp. 95-100

In this concept of karma, then, we find three ideas interwoven. The first is that of transmigration which was a means of explaining apparently irrational situations. The second was the idea of hell which was already present in the closing period of the Vedic age and was elaborated in the *Puranas* later. Then there was the idea of transference of guilt and merit which made possible external human help in seeking the amelioration for a person from the dire effects of his or her karma through the acts of another. Further there was also present the belief in inherited sin.⁷⁵ This arose with the conviction that disease was proof of sin and since disease is inherited sin may also be inherited. This may appear as inconsistent with the original concept of karma which insists that each man must suffer for his own sins or be rewarded for his excellence and it was certainly a modification. But this contradiction arose because of the mixing up of ritual and ethical ideas. These two sets of ideas arose in different circles and were eventually amalgamated. The theory of prasada is also an instance of similar modification on the metaphysical plane. As Hopkins argues: "Most of these modifications of karma are to be explained by the impact of divergent beliefs, which, older than karma, survived in one form or another, interposing themselves between the believer's mind and his newer belief."⁷⁶

VI

Such has been the history of the concept of karma and rebirth. Its long history stretching over almost two millennia is bound to reveal incongruities especially in view of the predilection for making it all-inclusive. But do we not find similar incongruities in concepts prevalent in other philosophies? We may now consider some of the aspects which would explain its remarkable vitality through the ages.

Radhakrishnan observes that "there is no doctrine that is so valuable in life and conduct as the karma theory" and that it implies hope for the future and resignation of the past.⁷⁷ It is an attempt to explain the universe in rational terms since karma argues that there is nothing uncertain or capricious in the moral

⁷⁵ See *Rig Veda*, VII, 86, 5; II, 28, 6

⁷⁶ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 588

⁷⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 125

world.⁷⁸ The law of karma is "the counterpart in the moral world of the physical law of uniformity. It is the law of the conservation of moral energy."⁷⁹ According to Weber the "Karma doctrine transformed the world into a strictly rational, ethically determined cosmos; it represents the most consistent theodicy ever produced by history."⁸⁰ In the opinion of L. Stanley Jast "Reincarnation, with its complimentary doctrine of karma, affords the best, in truth, the only working explanation of the mysteries of our life on earth. Without these illuminating ideas life becomes just a meaningless jumble. Our comings and goings, our changing contacts, the immense differences between man and man, in character, capacity, opportunity and condition, the tragic brevity and incompleteness of the single life, its successes, failures, fulfilments and frustrations, and perhaps, above all, the absence of any understandable end—all this reincarnation adequately explains."⁸¹

On the other hand there have been several critics who point out the defects of the karma concept. Thus the Reverend John McKenzie, a Scottish missionary, observes that it is the concept of karma, more than any other factor "that is responsible for the backwardness of the people of India in the work of ministering to the unfortunate". He also points out that in this doctrine "good and evil are thought of in terms of act rather than of character"; that involving as it does a fatalistic "explanation of human conduct, does nothing to solve the problem of inequalities of human fortunes"; that it "justifies the seeming injustices of life" and that it "is incompatible with the belief in the possibility of the forgiveness of sins". In view of all these defects the concept of karma "lacks justification on moral grounds".⁸² When something is written to prove the superiority of one theological system over another one is apt to indulge in oversimplification and half-truths. It is some thirty-seven years since the Reverend John McKenzie wrote and since then much research in Indological studies has been done. The concept of karma is really in two parts. One refers to the past and the other is an indication of the future. As Radhakrishnan explains "Karma is not inconsistent with freedom;

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ M. Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 121

⁸¹ J. Stanley Jast, *Reincarnation and Karma*, p. 9

⁸² *Hindu Ethics*, pp. 224-32

it is a condition not a destiny. In the *Gita* it is even a creative force, a principle of movement."⁸³ It tells us that the past is determined and the future only "conditioned. The spiritual element in man allows him freedom within the limits of his nature."⁸⁴ The trouble with several interpretations of the karma concept has been that the idea has been understood in a more or less mechanical manner but to do so is to drain it of all its force for it could only be properly understood from a spiritual point of view.⁸⁵ Now it may easily be conceded that "unfortunately, the theory of karma became confused with fatality in India when man himself grew feeble and was disinclined to do his best. It was made into an excuse for inertia and timidity and was turned into a message of despair and not of hope."⁸⁶ The very versatility of the concept subjected it to uses of varying intents at diverse periods of Indian history. In periods of social crises it could be easily turned into a doctrine of fatalism and there were many such periods of crises in Indian history. Karma as an ethical concept and karma as a ritual notion are of two different orders and the mixing up of these two orders was inevitable under certain given social and economic conditions. Karma as a ritual notion developed along with the growth of sacerdotalism whereas karma as an ethical concept received wide acceptance as a result of reaction against sacerdotal domination. The triumph of Kshattriya domination in league with sacerdotalism represented the decline of early Indian mercantilism and the devaluation of the value of socially necessary and productive labour. The mixing up of the two aspects of karma came about along with the unity of the Kshattriya and sacerdotal forces which led to serious modifications of the ethical implications of the karma concept and the elevation of its ritual notions into a system of ethics. It was in such a context, too, that the sociological implications of the karma doctrine emerged whereby the theory was used to justify the economic depression and social degradation of the Vaishya and Shudra classes. In such a situation the concept was turned upside down, or placed on its head as it were, when it was made to explain the present plight

⁸³ P. A. Schilpp (Ed), *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p. 95

⁸⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 75

⁸⁵ C. Humphreys, *Karma and Rebirth*, p. 12

⁸⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 76

with reference to past karma rather than to assure the future on the basis of present exertion. A man must reap as he sows, declared karma. Now it was made to say that *a man was reaping now as he must have sown in the past* which led to a justification of the present plight of the masses of the people. The present plight may be one of social and ceremonial impurity and that impurity was explained on the assumption that it may be the result of some ritual guilt, like not honouring the twice-born by a Shudra, as he was expected to do. The ideas of renunciation and non-acquisition were also pressed into service to urge those dispossessed that whereas their possessionlessness was spiritually promising for the future it was also intellectually comforting in their understanding of the present.

•But karma never lost its high ethical significance through the ages. It proclaimed that "man was mightier than his karma"⁸⁷ and that one of the ways of becoming free from the shackles of one's past karma was to work for the betterment of others through the notion of the transference of one's merit for the good of others. This notion of transference which, according to E. Washburn Hopkins was a deviation from the original concept, was socially necessary as it liberated karma from being too inexorably individualistic.⁸⁸ It was only when this theory of the possibility and nobility of the act of transference of karma was firmly established that the doctrine of the Bodhisattva, or the Saviour, in Mahayana Buddhism, could arise. The extreme individualistic element, almost an uncompromisingly selfish element, had to be liberalized so as to save the concept from becoming too narrow and selfish in intent. The development of the theory of avatara almost paralleled the growth of the notion of the transference of one's karma both of which are indications of a messianic trend in Indian religions. The contradictions between the inexorability of one's karma and the grace of God had also to be resolved and this was done with the introduction of the twin doctrines of prasada or divine grace and the necessity of performance of one's assigned karma in the spirit of yoga to secure that grace. This had to come about to make of karma "a spiritual necessity" rather than

⁸⁷ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 246

⁸⁸ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, pp. 586-7; also See Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 121

let it stop at being a "mechanical principle".⁸⁹ Karma and *Mukti* or salvation are but twin aspects of a single socio-ethical process. The Buddha, for instance, "distinguishes between karma and Nirvana. Karma is the principle which governs the world of objects, of cause and effects; Nirvana is the principle of subject which transcends the object, the centre of being."⁹⁰ And Nirvana or *Mukti* cannot be comprehended without first understanding the role of karma. It is only when karma is performed that it becomes an instrument of liberation and the apparent dichotomy between the two is striking. While karma is social, *mukti* is individual and it is only when the social role is played socially that individuality can find perfection.⁹¹

In describing karma as a species of the concept of fatalism it is necessary to remember that the two ideas had separate origins and functions. Fatalism depends for its philosophical assumptions on the existence of a mysterious power whose workings are beyond the comprehension of human beings. It is blind fate that is of supreme importance in the working of the concept of fate. There is, on the other hand, nothing mysterious or blind about the working of karma and it is an "entire misconception of the doctrine of karma to confound it with fatalism. The doctrine that as a man soweth so he shall reap, cannot be regarded as fatalistic. The doctrine is no more open to the charge of fatalism than the theory of determinism or belief in the law of causation."⁹²

VII

Our survey of the history of the concept of karma has shown so far that there were developing several distinct ideas alongside of each other. These ideas grew in different circles. As the concept of karma was being gradually taken over from the older concept of *rita-dharma* the material conditions of Indian society were visibly and perhaps violently changing. Outside of the purely Aryan circles there was in existence the concept of transmigration and in the Upanishadic period the two concepts came to be associated with each other. This synthesis of two distinct doctrines

⁸⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 73

⁹⁰ P. A. Schilpp, *The Philosophy of S. Radhakrishnan*, p. 55

⁹¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 122

⁹² P. S. Sivaswamy Aiyer, *Evolution of Hindu Moral Ideals*, p. 139

created certain difficulties. For, in addition to karma there was also present the concept of the other world whether that of heaven or hell. Commenting on the Vedic ideas of heaven A. A. Macdonell notes that "heaven is a glorified world of material joys as pictured by the imagination not of warriors but of priests. It is the world of the righteous where righteous and godly men, familiar with rites dwell in bliss. There they are united with what they have sacrificed and given especially reaping the reward of their pious gifts to priests." There were also developing ideas of hell in the *Rig Veda* itself where the general impression of hell is that of an underground darkness.⁹³ In the *Atharva Veda* hell is described as the "lowest darkness"⁹⁴ and the idea goes on developing until in the *Puranas* it is elaborated fully.⁹⁵ We have referred earlier to the process whereby the concept of hell is synthesized with that of karma whereby the evil-doer is first sent to hell to suffer torments for his heinous deeds and then reborn to expiate the rest of his evil karma. The ideas of heaven and hell developed both in hieratic and popular circles and came to be associated with the more intellectualized and metaphysical doctrine of karma. Karma was developing as a concept of value with ethical as well as social implications and had cosmic as well as psychological aspects.⁹⁶

What was the social background of all this development? We have already referred to the recurrent crises besetting the life of Indian society. Karma, transmigration and the idea of renunciation appeared at a time when the Aryans had pushed into the heartland of Aryavarta and as a result of which there followed the break-up of tribal society leading to the emergence of imperial polity. If the spirit of renunciation implied withdrawal from the world and world-weariness the doctrine of karma as a message of hope signified the re-entry of the ascetical spirit into the affairs of the world. This was the phase when the ascetical movements themselves were becoming partly socialized as they grew into religions. This is revealed in the history of Buddhism itself. Buddhism started as a monastic movement when the Buddha

⁹³ A. A. MacDonnell, *Vedic Mythology, Vedic Heaven and Hell*, pp. 168-9

⁹⁴ *Atharva Veda*, VIII, 2

⁹⁵ Manmatha Nath Dutta, *Garuda-Purana*, p. 149

⁹⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 123

preached his first sermon at Sarnath near Banaras. To become a follower of the Buddha meant, at least in the initial stages, renunciation of household which was likened to a "hole and corner"⁹⁷ whereas renunciation was likely to be in the open and the set monastic formula declared that it was not possible for a householder with all his cares and worries to achieve that for the sake of which the believing person wanders from home into a state of homelessness.⁹⁸ But this phase, for obvious reasons, could not last long since the homeless wanderers themselves had to depend on the charitable gifts of the householders for their maintenance. Then, again, by its very nature, the message of the Buddha could not be restricted to one section of the population. Gradually, therefore, Buddhism began to become socialized and in this aspect emerged as a religion. A distinct spiritual ideal, that of rebirth in heaven, was placed before the laity and once the doors of the faith were thrown open, the social dynamism of Buddhism made itself manifest by attracting large numbers of Vaishyas and Shudras to it. Asoka saw in this movement a force which could transcend the frontiers of region, caste and tribe and thus provide for his empire a kind of a spiritual basis and he patronized the creed. Under his patronage Buddhism spread far and wide and by the 2nd century B.C. had undergone a complete transformation not only in its spiritual and monastic aspects but also in its doctrinal bases.⁹⁹ This transformation took place against the historical background of the emergence of the great Maurya empire which signified a stage of great expansion into the hitherto unopened areas of the country; an expansion of the economy and a period of comparative prosperity of the hitherto submerged elements of the Indian population. But the Maurya empire had its own inherent contradictions for, on the one hand it rose against the background of the commercial revolution sweeping north-western and northern India indicated by the growth of the guilds and the rapid spread of punch-marked currency; on the other hand the empire could not exist without executive taxation and attempts at curbing the powers of the corporations. The crisis of the Maurya empire was further deepened by foreign invasions and finally came the downfall of the Mauryas through a dynastic revolution carried

⁹⁷ *Majjhima Nikaya*, II, p. 55

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ B. G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-100

out by the Shunga general Pushyamitra who, in many respects, also symbolized the re-emergence of Brahmanism. This Brāhmanism rose when a "villagism" was coming into existence and it expressed the spiritual values and ethical aspirations of this new kind of economy. From the 1st century A.D. to the time of the Guptas, Brahmanism, with the rise of sects like Vaishnavism and Shaivism, was slowly gaining public favour. With the rise of the Guptas it received imperial patronage. The ultimate development of the karma concept is seen both in the growth of Vedantic ideas and the theories of the *Puranas*. The synthesis of the theories of karma and daiva was worked out in the *Puranas* and karma became both a message of hope and an ordinance of resignation to fate. The subsequent crises of the Islamic invasions simply reinforced these aspects of karma. This trend continued down the centuries until there began the impact of the West under which there was a re-examination and reinterpretation of the concept of karma when the fatalistic aspect came to be increasingly rejected, at least among the intelligentsia, and karma as a call to endeavour came into increasing prominence.

The survival of the concept of karma through centuries of political and social upheaval very clearly indicates the vitality of the concept as a focus of thought. In periods of crises the ringing words of the *Gita* that one has a duty to perform one's karma but no right to expect rewards therefrom served as a force of cohesion in a milieu where everything seemed to be breaking down. In times of progress karma served equally well. This ubiquity of the concept in all phases of India's social and intellectual history was possible because of the fusion of the two trends of dynamism and fatalism ever present in the Indian mind. Centuries come and go but karma remains as a concept influencing the behaviour of countless millions of generations of the people of India.

CHAPTER SIX

SAMSA RA

Illusion and Reality

The Abbe J. A. Dubois, the French Catholic missionary, who lived in India during 1792 to 1823, observed that many people in India held the view that "all that we call the universe, including all the various phenomena which we see to be comprised within it, has no real existence at all, but is merely the result of illusion, which is known among them as *Maya*". The Abbe then goes on to recount a story illustrative of this world-view: "A certain man, in a dream, imagined that he had been crowned king of a certain country with great pomp and circumstance. The next morning, on leaving his house, he met a traveller, who gave him a detailed account of festivities and ceremonies that had actually taken place on the occasion of the coronation of the king of the same country, and of which he was himself an eye-witness. The incident related by the latter agreed in all particulars with what the former had dreamed. Illusion, *Maya*, was equally prevalent in both cases; and there was no more reality in what the one man had seen than in what the other man had dreamed."¹ This episode fairly typifies one interpretation of the Indian world-view which emphasizes the conclusion that the world, though apparently real, is really an illusion and the difference between an obvious reality and a vivid dream is as much as it is in the proverbial Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee! It is also often asserted that even when the Indian mind recognizes the reality of the world, it does not hold that world to be a worthwhile place in which obvious joy could be taken; that pessimism is a persistent trait in the Indian thinking about the world. It is further pointed out that this world-view has very much to do with the objective conditions of life as it developed in the country. For, if the world is either unreal or miserable or both there is not much sense in working for its

¹ H. K. Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies by the Abbe J. A. Dubois*, pp. 402-03

betterment.² As Albert Schweitzer states the ideal setup by the Indian world "of becoming spiritually more and more perfect is of necessity one-sided and inadequate".³ On the Indian side it has been urged that the "Indian world-view does not centre merely on man but rather on 'man-in-the-universe'".⁴ Now both of these views are true, for Indian ideas on the world have been expressed in the most diverse forms through the ages. And they have not been developed in isolation of a mental world unaffected by external events. The history of Indian ideas stretches over some 30 centuries during the course of which conditions of life fluctuated between times of prosperity and situations of utter degradation and defeat. These changing circumstances are necessarily reflected in the shift of emphasis in the sphere of ideas ranging from the most utter delight in the world to a thorough-going pessimism. The Indian world-view has not been a static concept though it is tempting to view it as such, as it facilitates an easy formulation in somewhat generalized terms. It is our purpose here to trace the various stages through which this world-view passed and to focus attention on the fact that throughout its history this world-view comprised three distinct strands or levels in thinking.

II

The three distinct strands are (a) the belief that the world is not only real but is also desirable in itself; (b) that the world is real but is full of suffering and (c) that the world is essentially an illusion. Viewed in a limited chronological perspective these three ideas appear as succeeding each other until finally the last phase becomes the dominant pattern of thought persisting through the period following its first formulation in the Vedānta. As we shall see presently, it will be erroneous to hold that the idea of the world as mere illusion was either widely accepted or that it became a dominant note in Indian thinking, except for several short periods. These periods corresponded with conditions of disintegration in the history of the country. While it is true that in general terms certain broad systems were, more or less, com-

² See A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, pp. 7-9

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁴ Tagore, *Sadhana, or the Realization of Life*, p. 10

pletely committed to one or the other of the views stated above it is necessary to keep in mind the possibilities of those very systems reflecting from time to time, opposite tendencies. An instance in point is that of Buddhism which contributed to the development of the concept of the world as both real and full of misery slowly changing over to a world-view which de-emphasized sorrow and gradually introduced such concepts as the absolute necessity of living life albeit in order to realize certain transcendental aims. This should not sound surprising if it is borne in mind that creeds and systems developed in response to ideological and spiritual needs of changing times displaying changing economic and social conditions. We should also bear in mind the formulation of concepts on two distinct planes such as the purely intellectual and theoretical. These concepts were also moulded by the prevailing material conditions in the world of everyday life.

In an earlier chapter it was indicated that there were three distinct periods of crises in the history of India. The first period of crises related to the break-down on primitive tribalism consequent to the Aryan advance into the heartland of northern India, the Gangetic area, especially Magadha and eastern India. This period is foreshadowed in the *Upanishads* and is reflected in the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. It was at this period that ideas of pessimism, renunciation and other-worldliness began to gain ground. But the mood soon changed with the establishment of the Maurya empire, during the course of which Buddhism itself underwent far-reaching changes. This mood of resurgence is expressed in the *Bhagavadgita* and develops into the *Puranas* which, though they paid lip-tribute to the concept of renunciation, really busied themselves with affairs of this world as they influenced the next. The second period of crisis came with the break-up of the imperial polity after the disintegration of the Gupta empire and this condition continued through the early medieval ages in which the philosophy of adwaita of which the concept of Maya is an integral part, developed. That mood was somewhat modified as a result of contact with Islamic monotheistic ideas and the stabilization of conditions under the national monarchy which Akbar attempted to establish. The third period of crisis came with the break-up of the Mughal empire, or to put it more precisely, the spiritual crisis of the Mughal empire when from the time of Shah Jahan (1628-1657) the policy espoused by

Akbar came to be reversed in the direction of religious persecution and increasing economic burdens on the common people. The reaction at this time, however, was generically quite different from the earlier reactions for the reaction now was in the direction of a militant nationalism on the part of the Marathas and the Sikhs. The political philosophy of the Marathas, at the time of their rise, is well expressed in the preaching of Saint Ramdas (second half of the 17th century) which in a certain sense, inspired Shivaji's own philosophy of life. This reaction was positive and accepted the world as it appeared and inspired men to change it nearer to their heart's desire. Subsequently with the beginning of the Western impact on Indian thinking the ideas of pessimism began to recede into the background and the culmination of this trend came in the work of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

If we keep this historical background firmly in view and correlate the changing patterns of the Indian world-view with happenings in the country a different interpretation is likely to emerge. We believe it is necessary to approach the problem from the end of historical happenings and examine concepts in the context of historical conditions which comprise social and economic circumstances. The work of analyzing concepts as they stand and are revealed in the literature of India has been accomplished in a large measure as the long list of expository works on Indian philosophy may well show. Our purpose here is not so much to go into the metaphysical subtleties of the concept of world-view as to attempt to understand it as a pattern oscillating between two extremes of an intense delight in the world and an equally intense disappointment with it, and explore whether these oscillations could be better comprehended in the light of their co-relation with social phenomena through the centuries. We will now turn to the examination of the three levels or strands existing within the corpus of the Indian world-view as outlined above.

III

The earliest world-view is naturally reflected in the *Vedas*. The Vedic Aryans "were essentially an active, energetic, warrior people, engaged indeed in struggles with the aborigines, and even among themselves, but in the main prosperous and contented with their

life.”⁵ Life to them was happy, bright and joyful and the sweetness of existence and the beauty of the world were apparent to them. Their religion expressed “the delight of man at being in a world full of pleasures. The gods were feared and also trusted. Life on earth was simple and sweet innocence.”⁶ Praying to Agni they sang “may the morning rise for us, abounding with oblations, with pious prayers, and with auspicious signs, and conferring wealth”.⁷ Brihaspati they asked to grant them “precious treasures”.⁸ In the hymns to Ushas, the Goddess of Dawn, the delight felt by the Aryans is brought out best. They sing to her: “Dawn on us with prosperity, O Ushas, daughter of the sky, Dawn with great glory, goddess, lady of the light, dawn thou with riches, bounteous one. They, bringing steeds and kine, boon givers of all wealth, have oft sped forth to lighten us. O Ushas, waken up for me the sounds of joy; send us the riches of the great.”⁹ But it is in the hymns to Indra that the exultant mood shows most clearly. Time and again is his prowess praised; his guidance is sought for victories in battles and conquest of the lands and wealth of the foes of the Aryans.¹⁰ To them the world is not only very real but full of promise, stocked with unbounded wealth and opportunities to gain it. There is some fear of the unknown but the faith in gods and in their powers is too strong to let the unknown worry them too much. In such a frame of mind “there is no basis for any conception of the unreality of the world” for it is “not a purposeless phantom, but is just the evolution of God”.¹¹

Such was the dominant mood until approximately the 8th century B.C. And in spite of the rise of different ideas it continued to influence the world-view. In the Upanishadic period arise for the first time perhaps, some doubts about the nature of the world as propounded by the spirit of the early Aryan thought. The world is still real for it is the creation of Atman, the supreme reality behind all phenomena and Atman created the world be-

⁵ A. B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, I, p. 243

⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 22

⁷ H. H. Wilson, *Rig Veda Samhita*, Asthaka III & IV, p. 3

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110

⁹ S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, p. 13

¹⁰ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 40

¹¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 103

cause "He desired a second".¹² Shadows of doubt fits across the mental horizon and there is considerable mental exercise to delve deep to fathom the nature of the dream and the reality. There are streaks of pessimism making their appearance vivid in quasi-metaphorical terms though as Radhakrishnan argues "There is hardly any suggestion in the Upanishads that the entire universe of change is a baseless fabric of fancy, a mere phenomenal show or a world of shadows." They do not teach "that life is a nightmare and the world a barren nothing, rather it is pulsing and throbbing with the rhythm of world harmony. The world is God's revelation of Himself. His joy assumes all these forms."¹³ The *Upanishads*, continues the same authority, "do not ask us to renounce life, do not taboo desires as such. The essence of ethical life is not the sublation of the will" and "the false asceticism which regards life as a dream and the world as an illusion... is foreign to the prevailing tone of the Upanishads."¹⁴ But then it may be asked: What about Maya, the concept of illusion? To this Radhakrishnan replies "The *Upanishads* support the doctrine of Maya only in the sense that there is an underlying reality containing all elements."¹⁵ Life, for the thinkers of the *Upanishads*, concludes Radhakrishnan, "is no empty dream and the world no delirium of spirit. In the later versions of rebirth in Indian thought we miss this ennobling ideal, and birth becomes the result of an error of the soul and samsara a dragging chain."¹⁶

But the intrusion of the other stream of thought is too persistent to enable us to draw absolute conclusions about the attitude of "world-affirmation" in the *Upanishads*. It is possible that pessimism as a habit of thought arose in circles different from those under the influence of the old Vedic religion. Whereas the geographical and economic background of the *Rig Veda* is one of continually expanding frontiers the *Upanishads* breathe the air of a sedentary society which has already known for some time institutions much more advanced than those described in the Vedic book. There are overtones of a social conflict between the

¹² *Bṛihadaranyakopaniṣad*, I, 4, 103

¹³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 62

¹⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 219

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 197

¹⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 23

hieratic and heroic classes (Brahmanas and Kshattriyas); there is also an 'assimilation of concepts of renunciation and occasionally, though not distinctly, a reflection of world-weariness which may be assumed to have developed in circles under great strain of political, economic and social disintegration. It is in this context that the *Upanishads* begin to speak of degrees of Reality, a concept which seems to have arisen on two grounds. The first one concerned a clear recognition of the limited intelligence of man and the second related to the unbounded grandeur and magnificence of the Absolute.¹⁷ As Radhakrishnan explains: "according to the *Upanishads*, plurality, succession in time, co-existence in space, relations of cause and effect, oppositions of subject and object, are not the highest reality. But this is not saying that they are non-existent. The *Upanishads* support the doctrine of *Maya* only in the sense that there is an underlying reality containing all elements from the personal God to the telegraph post."¹⁸ The world is not the Absolute though the temporal process is an actual process through which Reality makes itself manifest.¹⁹ In this concept, then, *samsara* becomes a discipline, a succession of spiritual opportunities, a stage in the long journey of the spirit.²⁰

The shift in the emphasis is noteworthy. Life now becomes a means and not the end in itself. It is a stage, and a short-lived one at that. The world exists but existence is only a path leading finally to the Eternal and the Changeless which alone is the Real. This existence is full of distractions and vexations and these at best can only be tolerated. The idea is not to make the most of this world for itself because to do so is to ignore the demands of the Absolute. Such a concept was naturally shaped by ideas of karma and rebirth which we examined in an earlier chapter. While the concept of karma resulted in a sudden expansion of intellectual and spiritual frontiers it necessarily led to a certain diminution and devaluation of terrestrial life. The movement away from the world had begun.

IV

That movement found its early fruition in Monastic Buddhism. For its political and economic background Monastic Buddhism had the spectacle of the disintegration of one pattern of life and the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23

gradual emergence of another. The Buddhist works in Pali constantly refer to the existence of numerous republican tribes threatened with submergence by the rise of the early imperialism of Magadha under Bimbisara and Ajatashatru. The petty principalities and the tribal oligarchies were falling before the onslaught of the hammer-blows delivered by different kinds of armies reared by the rulers of Magadha. Aggression and stratagem, economic pressures and outright annexations, these were the methods of imperial consolidation. In the social sphere there was the triumphant entry of Brahmanism with all its hierarchical, social theories and economic activities and their rewards. It is not without significance that the very first sermon of the Buddha is the celebrated "Fire Sermon" for it also symbolizes the social conflagration that was then going on. The Buddha exhorted his followers to perceive that "Everything was on fire".²¹ "Why this laughter" asks the *Dhammapada*, "why that joy when the world is perpetually a-burning?"²² There is a perception of a universe in eternal flux where nothing is stable. Samsara, existence, is a mere bubble, a mirage.²³ The body itself is a variegated image full of disease without any stability or permanence.²⁴ Death is the end of all²⁵; hard is human life.²⁶ The factors of being are impermanent for death lies in wait to carry off men like a flood sweeping off a sleeping hamlet.²⁷ He is only a fool who thinks that sons or wealth belong to him for not even is the self one's own.²⁸ The world is shrouded in darkness²⁹ and existence is like a heap of garbage.³⁰ Life in the world, therefore, is a "hole-and-corner life"³¹ whereas renunciation is like in the open. In such a mood there is little importance to be attached to the tinsel goods and pleasures of the world. Utterances like these breathe an air of intense social crisis. There is a demand for withdrawal from the world though the Buddha himself regarded this withdrawal as a means of transcendence and a prelude to re-entry in a totally different form and role. There is a charming legend about the

²¹ "Sabbam pi bhikkhave adittam"; H. Oldenberg, *Vinaya Pitaka I Mahavagga*, I, pp. 35-6

²² *Dhammapada*, 146

²³ Lord Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, II, p. 38; *Dhammapada*, 170; also 40; 41

²⁴ *Dhammapada*, 147

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 148; also see *Bhagavadgita*, 27

²⁶ *Dhammapada*, 182

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 255; 277-9; 47; 135

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 62

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 174

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59

³¹ Chalmers, *op. cit.*, I, p. 173

Buddha's hesitation about making this re-entry which is worth narrating in some detail. Soon after his Enlightenment the Buddha thought that if he were to preach his profound doctrine and "were others not to understand it, that would be labour and annoyance to me". But Brahma Sahampati came to know of his thoughts and instantly appearing before the Enlightened One implored the Blessed One that "Beings there are whose vision is but little dimmed, who are perishing because they do not hear the Doctrine; these will understand it." And then moved with compassion for the world the Buddha declared in his Lion's Roar "Nirvana's doors stand open wide to all with ears to hear. Discard your outworn creeds!" With these immortal words the Buddha signified his re-entry into the world with the "turning of the Wheel of Law".³² But this re-entry was to ensure that his disciples, such as the ones who flocked to him, would be partakers "not of the world's goods" but of the Doctrine.³³

The Four Noble Truths which form the very basis of the Buddhist creed reveal the nature of early Monastic Buddhism as a social force. The first two truths concern themselves with the nature and cause of this all-enveloping misery of samsara and the last two show the way out of it. The first truth says that birth is misery, decay is misery, sickness is misery, death is misery; to be associated with the unpleasant is misery; to be deprived of what one wants is misery; in brief the five factors of grasping are misery. The second truth declares craving to be the cause of this misery while the third truth indicates the complete cessation of this craving to be the way to end misery. The last truth describes the Noble Eightfold Path as the means of ending all misery.³⁴

It has often been argued that early Monastic Buddhism preaches a gospel of unalloyed pessimism. Some have pointed out that this pessimism is the old Indian tendency already manifest in the *Rig Veda*. Thus Urquhart states that though the Vedic religion is one of light and gladness these are "somewhat superficial". The joy "is not the assured result of struggle. It is rather the happiness of innocence, possible only through an advocate of the truly spiritual quest."³⁵ He further argues that "the logical outcome of certain tendencies of Vedic thought was a growing sense of the helplessness of the individual and of the poverty and wretchedness

³² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 117- 21

³³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 9

³⁴ *Mahavagga*, I, p. 10

³⁵ W. S. Urquhart, *Pantheism and the Value of Life*, p. 79

of his life in the presence of universal forces.”³⁶ This seems to be too sweeping a generalization unsupported by any substantial evidence from the Rig Vedic book itself. We have seen above that there intrudes into the world of Upanishadic thought a streak of pessimism. Says the *Maitriupanishad*, “Verily all this world merely decays. Look at the flies and the gnats, the grass and the trees that are born merely to perish. But what of these? The great oceans dry up, the mountains crumble, the pole-star deviates from its place, the wind-cords are broken, the earth is submerged and the very gods are dislocated from their positions.”³⁷ And the *Kathopanishad* argues: “What decaying mortal here below would delight in a life of the contemplation of the pleasures of beauty and love, when once he has come to taste of the kind of life enjoyed by the unaging immortals?”³⁸ The *Upanishads*, as pointed out by Ranade, display an anti-hedonist tendency and this sometimes degenerates into pessimism. Ranade states that “to the Upanishadic seers as to the later Indian philosophers, the world itself was a grand purgatory where the effects of sin were to be wiped out by good action.”³⁹ This anti-hedonistic tendency bordering on pessimism came to the surface in Buddhism and Jainism in their earlier phases of the development of those creeds. Buddhism and Jainism, observes Radhakrishnan, “admit the ideal of the negation of life and personality. To both life is a calamity to be avoided at all costs. They require us to free ourselves from all the ties that bind us to nature and bring us sorrow. They glorify poverty and purity, peace and patient suffering.”⁴⁰ But in this Buddhism and Jainism were only carrying to their logical conclusion the pessimistic premises postulated in the *Upanishads* and their negation of life is no more absolute than is the one implicit in the theory of Maya as propounded by the great Shankara himself.

But this phase of total negation of life was soon to change into something more positive. This came about as a result of the operation of two factors. One was the admission of the laity as an integral part of the Buddhist community. While it is difficult

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83

³⁷ *Maitriupanishad*, I, 2-7

³⁸ *Kathopanishad*, I, 1, 28

³⁹ R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*, II, p. 163; pp. 292-3

⁴⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 329

to set precise chronological limits to the development of highly complex and intellectual phenomena like changes in the conceptual superstructure of a religious system we may not be far wrong if it is assumed that the purely monastic phase of Buddhism did not last for more than a decade or so during the ministry of Gautama. Already during his life-time we read of his accepting the laity and recommending frequent consultations⁴¹ with the laity on the part of the Order. Conceptually the laity may accept the premise that the world is full of misery but actually it had to make a go of that world if only to support the Order, as a means of winning merit. It is true that a clear distinction was made between the spiritual possibilities open to monks and nuns and the laymen and it was emphasized that Nirvana could not be obtained without joining the Order.⁴² But social pressures were constantly acting on the early Buddhist Monastic community and under these pressures there were brought about far-reaching conceptual changes. Patronage of rich bankers like Anathapindika and powerful monarchs like Bimbisara and Pasendi of Kosala resulted in the recognition of worldly activities as socially necessary for the very existence of the Order itself.⁴³ And then came the establishment of the Maurya empire (324 B.C.) by which time the political crisis was resolved, once and for all, in favour of imperial polity replacing tribal polity. Under the patronage of Asoka (273-232 ? B.C.) Buddhism underwent not only geographical extension but also doctrinal changes as it emerged as a full-fledged religion of the masses of the people of the country by which its earlier purely monastic form was largely modified. There was also the influence of the doctrine of karma which was regarded as essential for salvation. If there can be no Nirvana without a prior accumulation of merit there can be no such prior accumulation without action in the world in behalf of fellow-beings. The rise of the *Jataka* literature reflected the fact that Buddhahood was no accident of history but a deliberate choice carefully worked out by the Bodhisattva through innumerable births and lives. The *Jataka* lore, by its very nature, primarily concerns this world which is recognized as full of hazards and misfortunes but is accepted as a place which alone would make the accumulation of merit possible. The sculptured reliefs on the railings of the *stupas* at

⁴¹ See B. G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Asoka*, pp. 25-9

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 34

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 238 ff

Samchi and Barhut⁴⁴ reflect the ethos of this new Buddhism which had travelled a long way from its early attitude of complete renunciation and arrived at a point where it had carried out an adjustment with the world of everyday beings and their affairs.

Once this trend was started it was not difficult to develop it rapidly. And this development is reflected in the growth of the Bodhisattva concept and its saviour cult of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is a creed whereby Buddhism is once again reinforced by a social content and the Buddhist ideal gets socialized through its ethics. It was an instrument of social integration, a means of rapport with the world, a turning away from complete world-negation to more-or-less world acceptance. The early ideal of the *Arhat*—Perfect Man—was found to be too individualistic and restricted and was naturally substituted by the larger humanistic concept of the Bodhisattva who renounces his own Nirvana so that he can live in the world and help the multitude of suffering humanity find its salvation. This new attitude is wonderfully expressed through the beautiful painting of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara in Cave II at Ajanta.⁴⁵ These paintings convey the idea that though the Buddha may not be of the world he is still in it. The world now was real and full of hardship but necessary as a challenge to the spirit of man in quest of transcendence. The Buddha's Fire Sermon and the Ajanta painting of Padmapani represent the two ends of the Buddhist process of adjustment to the world.

V

In Brahmanism also a similar process was at work. What Mahayana is to early Monastic Buddhism the *Gita* is to the *Upanishads*. Overshadowing the movement of thought from the *Vedas* to the *Gita* stands the most dramatic event of the fratricidal war of which the *Mahabharata* sings. The two epics reflect two politico-cultural phases. Whereas the *Mahabharata* is a symbol of Kshatriya consolidation the *Ramayana* stands for Aryan expansion.⁴⁶ The Bharata war marks the end of one epoch and the beginning of another. With it the "heroic" age comes to an end

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 256-9

⁴⁵ See B. G. Gokhale, *Ancient India, History and Culture*, pp. 191-2

⁴⁶ See Chapter One, Note 31

and the imperial era begins. This transition poses critical social and economic problems. It is not for nothing that the *Puranas* gloomily speak of the end of the rule of true Kshatriyas and the regimen of nondescript social elements among whom the Nandas and Mauryas are prominent.⁴⁷ The rise and decline of the Maurya empire produced in Brahmanical circles a reaction against the overtones of pessimism in the *Upanishads* and the monastic other-worldliness of Buddhism and Jainism. There is a parallel here to the reaction in concepts as shown in the rise of militant philosophy of the Marathas and the Sikhs. That philosophy was born of a sense of oppression felt as a consequence of persecution stemming from the spiritual crisis of the Mughal empire. The Maratha saints did not preach withdrawal from the world, on the other hand Ramdas in his *Dasbodh* called upon the people to fight tyranny and persecution and create an *Anandavanabhavana*—an ideal land where spiritual and cultural values may be fully preserved.⁴⁸ The same work is done first by the *Gita*. If we may accept the period 200 B.C. - A.D. 200 as the time when the *Gita* was composed in its present form then it is not difficult to understand its social and political background. In the second century B.C. came the disintegration of the Maurya empire which was replaced by the rule of the Shungas through the first century B.C. This was also the time of the Bactrian invasions led by Demetrios and Menander. The collapse of a mighty empire and the devastation caused by foreign invasions could have been conditions conducive to an attitude of withdrawal from the world. But, the reaction produced was different. On the one hand the *Gita* insists upon the primacy of the claims of the world and on the other tries to reconcile these claims to the needs of the spiritual realm. It posits an apparent conflict between this world and that, only to resolve it through its powerful philosophy of sustained and selfless action. The world is real and poses serious challenges to the spirit of man. The nature of these challenges is dramatized through their focussing on the episode of the fratricidal war for which the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas stand poised on the historic battlefield of Kurukshetra. Surveying the opposing phalanxes Arjuna, the Eternal Man, questions his own motives in meeting this challenge and resolves upon withdrawing from action.

⁴⁷ See B. G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Asoka*, pp. 128-30.

⁴⁸ See G. S. Sardesai, *A New History of the Marathas*, I, p. 276.

But Krishna advises him to face the challenge and do his duty towards the society of which he is a part and the world within which he has his being. The world, says Krishna, is the fruit of action for "from food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being and sacrifice is born of work."⁴⁹ It is interesting to refer here to stanzas on food in the *Taittiriya Brahmana*. Referring to Brahman they sing: "I am the first born of the divine essence. Before the gods sprang into existence I was. I am the navel (the centre and source) of immortality. Whoever bestows me on others thereby keeps me to himself. I am food. I feed on food and on its feeder."⁵⁰ In this connection Zimmer aptly remarks that food here is a symbol of the combination of matter and force⁵¹ the reality of which is self-evident. When the divine itself is completely involved in the world how can man ever think of withdrawing from it? For, Krishna declares, "whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age."⁵² This world, then is the creation of the Lord and is as real as is the Lord. When the Lord himself is involved in his creation how can man ever hope to withdraw himself from it. This idea is very beautifully expressed by Tagore in the following lines: "Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our Master has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever. Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow."⁵³

The *Gita*, thus, reminds men that the world is not only real but is essentially a field of action for them. This action is ordained by a man's station in life and this station is determined by "temperament and vocation"⁵⁴ and the social order is laid down by the Creator Himself. If liberation from the world is desired it

⁴⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 136

⁵⁰ *Taittiriya Brahmana*, II, 88

⁵¹ H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. 345

⁵² *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 8; See Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, pp. 154-5

⁵³ R. Tagore, *Gitanjali*, p. 9 ⁵⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 161

cannot be secured by renouncing the world but by playing one's part in it as determined by the situation of one's own life. If this action is performed without any thought of selfish recompense and as a matter of getting no more than the joy of doing one's duty to the best of one's ability then it becomes liberating and not binding. The *Gita* obviously aimed at accomplishing two ends. One was to reverse the trend of getting away from the world in the face of challenges from it and the other was to reinforce the social and economic order shaken almost to its foundations by wars and dynastic and religious revolutions. The times demanded, for sheer social survival, a gospel of affirmation of the world with all its heritage and challenges. The Bactrian and Scythian invasions and the pessimism of some aspects of the Upanishadic and Buddhistic thought needed a counterpoise in social and economic interest and this was provided by the *Gita* through its message of unreserved acceptance of the world of Samsara with the end of transforming men's existence into purposeful life in view. The thought of the *Gita* and the *Puranas* formed the intellectual and spiritual background for the rise of a new imperial polity under the guidance of the great Guptas. A Golden Age could not rise from a mental world of withdrawal from the world and pessimism. Under the impact of a newly emerging pattern of new social and economic relations, pessimism as a philosophy of life was yielding place to a creed of vigorous action in the world of reality.

It was this attitude that was largely reflected in the major *Dharmashastras* (200 B.C. to A.D. 400) and the *Puranas* (300 B.C. to A.D. 500 ?) The *Dharmashastras* seldom question the reality of the world and insist on human beings following their own dharma (social, economic, political and spiritual duties). They generally frown upon untimely withdrawal from the world and prescribe that renunciation must be preceded by discharge of appropriate obligations as a householder.⁵⁵ They adhere to the view that the world is a divine creation and its principal basis is in dharma for the enforcement of which the institution of the state was created.⁵⁶ The *Puranas* generally follow the account of the creation of the world as given in the Vedic literature, the epics and the *Dharmashastras* and their world-view is not different at all from the world-view of these texts.

⁵⁵ *Vishnudharmashastra*; S.B.E. VII, pp. 276-7

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-23

Since the *Dharmashastras* and the *Puranas* are devoted to the exposition of ideas on ethical, social and ritual duties it is not surprising that they adopt a world-view which is positive in its orientation. But this realistic trend was also evident on the more metaphysical plane as shown in many aspects of the conceptual world of the Samkhya, Vaisheshika, Nyaya and Mimamsa schools which were developing during this period.⁵⁷ It is only in the *Shunya* philosophy of Buddhism that there appeared a restatement of the early Monastic Buddhist attitude of negation of the world. "The central idea" of this philosophy is "the complete denial and renunciation of, the complete withdrawal and liberation from the world around us, in all its aspects and along its entire breadth."⁵⁸ The term *Shunya* was known though very slightly used in Pali Buddhism and it was Nagarjuna who worked out (*circa* A.D. 200 ?) the germinal idea which is stated in the view that the world is imprisoned between "it is" and "it is not" and perfection is reached when this dichotomy is transcended. To the question about the nature of the world only two replies, in this line of thinking, are possible; "in the first place, it is pure unreality, and it is needless to explain the unreal. Secondly, it has its origin in a previous state of illusion, and so on *ad infinitum*, rendering any further explanation needless."⁵⁹ All this went on on the high metaphysical level of intricate analysis and endless debate. On the plane of everyday life however, it was understood that "illusion absolute or illusion relative, the world has an enormous importance for the Madhyamaka and for the Mahayana generally; whatever it be in ultimate analysis, it must be practically treated as if it were real, and the narrow conception of an individual struggle for release gives place to a grandiose conception of efforts to bring salvation to the world and an elaborate theology worthy to rival the best products of Indian sectarian belief."⁶⁰

The sprouting of the concept of Emptiness or Void was, in a sense, but a continuation of the attitude of regarding the world as an illusion. This becomes manifest for the first time in some aspects of the thought of the *Upanishads*. Early Monastic

⁵⁷ Radhakrishnan and Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 447-8; also see *Manava-dharmashastra*, I, 31; VIII, 172; VIII, 418

⁵⁸ E. Conze, *Buddhism; Its Essence and Development*, p. 132

⁵⁹ A. B. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 239

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241

Buddhism interposed the idea of the world as both real and full of sorrow though later on this view was considerably modified under the stress of historical circumstances to which we have referred earlier. But the illusion theory was never completely submerged and erupted once again with full metaphysical force in the philosophy of thinkers like Nagarjuna. When both the illusion theory and the concept that the world was both real and sorrowful held sway in certain areas of intellectual thought on the popular level there was a resurgence of the old Vedic concept that the world was real and not without joy. In this there is revealed the persistence of two levels in Indian culture namely the hieratic and the folk. The hieratic level plays from time to time with the two concepts of illusion and reality and misery of the world whereas the folk level steadfastly adheres to the view of the Vedic thinkers. And the folk level emerges to the surface in times of intense political and social crisis which invariably acts as a prelude to an age of prosperity and creativity in Indian history.

The Gupta age is rightly regarded as an age of revival of the old Vedic religion. Samudra Gupta performed the famous Horse Sacrifice which was also performed earlier by Pushyamitra Shunga⁶¹ (187-152 B.C.) who heralded the dawn of the Brahmanical revival. Samudra Gupta (A.D. 350-380 ?) was a great conqueror and was well versed in the Brahmanical lore. During the time of the Gupta age Vaishnavism and Shaivism emerged as creeds with a large following. It was in this age that great literature and art were created and the general view of samsara was one of realism characterized by an obvious joy in living. There was some carry-over of the old concept of the world as an illusion but its influence cannot be reasonably said to have extended beyond the small intellectual circles. For the large masses of the people the world was as real as was the empire powerful and glorious. Illusion and reality were identical and significant.

VI

By A.D. 475 the Gupta Empire was already in decline and half a century later scarcely any trace of that mighty edifice was left behind. The Hun invasions had shaken its foundations and the

⁶¹ See B. G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2

crisis of ancient Indian imperial polity was already unfolding itself. From time to time parts of the country enjoyed strong rule and imperial sway. Harsha (A.D. 606-647), the Rashtrakutas (A.D. 733-973 ?), the Pallavas (A.D. 200-800), the "imperial" Pratiharas and Cholas and Palas and Senas fought interminable wars unaffected by the threat of the Islamic invasions of A.D. 712, A.D. 1000-1026 and A.D. 1175-1205. Political crisis invariably presaged economic impoverishment and the division of India into numerous mutually hostile kingdoms, so-called empires, and principalities indicated the disintegration of the very structure of political, social and economic life.

The intellectual background of this age was dominated by such giants as Gaudapada, Shankara and Ramanuja. It was the age of the final ascendancy of the Vedanta, especially, in the intellectual circles of the Advaita theory of Shankara (*circa* A.D. 788-820 ?). Shankara is the great intellectual giant who has left the impress of his penetrating intellect and subtle metaphysical formulations on the intellectual history of India. He takes his stand on the substance of the teachings of the great *Upanishads* and strives to reduce them to a relentlessly logical pattern. He asserts that Brahman alone is real; everything else is illusion and Brahman and Atman are but one. If Reality is one multiplicity must be unreal and the world being a world of multiplicity is necessarily a world of illusion. In his *Vakyavritti* he lays down his view of the world in the following terms. 'The world is harassed by three kinds of misery namely (a) misery of body and mind; (b) misery arising from perishable creatures and (c) misery arising from actions of supernatural forces.⁶² To the earlier belief that the world is an emanation of Brahman he proposes the amendment the "world is attributed to Brahman as the snake to the rope".⁶³ He rejects, however, the theory of Emptiness (*Shunyavada*). He argues that the "world is not the absolute, though based upon it. What is based upon the real, and is not the real itself, can only be called the appearance or phenomenon of the real. While the world is not the essential truth of Brahman, it is its phenomenal truth, the manner in which we are compelled to regard the real as it presents itself within our finite experience. But all this does not touch

⁶² *Vakyavritti*, p. 3

⁶³ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, II, p. 580

the practical reality of the world.”⁶⁴ The world is regarded as Maya “since it cannot be accepted as real” and there should really be no question of positing any relationship between Brahman and the world. “The world has its basis in Brahman. But Brahman is and is not identical with the world. It is, because the world is not apart from Brahman; it is not because Brahman is not subject to the mutations of the world. Brahman is not the sum of the things of the world. If we separate Brahman and the world, we cannot bind them except loosely, artificially and externally. Brahman and the world are one and exist as reality and appearance.”⁶⁵ For our purpose here it is not necessary to go into the great ontological and metaphysical subtleties of the *Advaita Vedanta*; suffice it to note the effect of such a philosophy on the world-view. It may not have been Shankara’s intention to reduce the entire world of experience to Maya or illusion but it cannot be denied that in numerous minds this has been so. Radhakrishnan stoutly defends Shankara’s position and rightly so for Shankara himself accommodates the way of works along with the path of knowledge as the initial and final means of salvation.⁶⁶ On the other hand it is difficult to deny in the context of concepts like those of the sole reality of the Brahman and the tendency to look upon the world as Maya the argument that “the essential self of man is never involved in the doings of the phenomenal world. From the ultimate point of view, therefore, the question of the role of man—the real man—in this world would have no relevance whatsoever.” Therefore, “life in this world is accordingly to be looked upon as a bridge over which one has, of necessity, to pass in order to reach one’s destination, but on which it would be unwise to build one’s house.”⁶⁷ It may be argued, as Tagore did, that the “aim of renunciation, truly understood, was not so much a turning away from the world into the “blank emptiness of negation” but it was rather for “gaining the world in perfect truth.”⁶⁸ Or that “when the Hindu thinkers ask us to free ourselves from Maya, they are asking us to shake off our bondage to the unreal values which are dominating us. They do not ask us to treat life as an illusion

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 584

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 566

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 279 ff

⁶⁷ R. N. Dandekar, “The Role of Man in Hinduism”; K. Morgan (Ed), *The Religion of the Hindus*, p. 133

⁶⁸ R. Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 31

or be indifferent to the world's welfare."⁶⁹ But if Shankara did not really mean to ascribe the nature of illusion to the world of experience Ramanuja's (A.D. 1027-1137 ?) refutation of the theory of Maya would be tantamount to setting up straw men only to knock them down. It seems reasonable to hold that the *Advaita Vedanta* of Shankara was held to have posited a world that was illusory and unreal and meant an attitude of negation of the world. This position was clearly unsatisfactory to many and Ramanuja took it upon himself to enunciate his own interpretation of the Vedanta wherein the reality of the world was rehabilitated and it is significant to note here that whereas the Advaita was restricted in its influence to a small circle of intellectuals the Vedanta as preached by Ramanuja had an extensive following.⁷⁰

Besides being a mighty philosopher Shankara was also responsible for the re-establishment, in a rather vigorous form, of the institution of Hindu monasticism. He is credited with having re-established the ascendancy of Hinduism over Buddhism and is the symbol of the resurgence of Hindu philosophy. From our point of view here it is significant to note that while Shankara carried to its logical conclusion the earlier concept of the world as an illusion that trend was reversed within a couple of centuries when Ramanuja preached again the view of the reality of the world.

VII

By 1206 the Muslim Sultanate was established in Delhi. Within a hundred years of that event practically the whole of India suffered from the continued depredations of Muslim invasions and rule. The establishment of the Muslim state created intensely critical conditions among the Hindus. Their temples were plundered and desecrated, their women often dishonoured and they were compelled to pay hateful taxes like the Jizia. As pointed out by Jadunath Sarkar religious toleration under a Muslim state was the exception rather than the rule⁷¹ and "the Islamic theocracy when set up over a composite population has

⁶⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, p. 47

⁷⁰ B. Kumarappa, *Hindu Conception of Deity*, p. 217

⁷¹ J. N. Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzeb*, p. 146

the worst vices of oligarchy and of alien rule combined.”⁷² The Islamic theory of the state, as stated by Sarkar, produced in the Muslim community a frame of mind “which habitually regarded plunder and homicide as the purest of human acts, as “exertion (*jehad*) in the path of God”. The murder of infidels (*kafir-kushi*) is counted as merit in a Muslim. It is not necessary that he should tame his own passions or mortify his flesh; it is not necessary for him to grow a rich growth of spirituality. He has only to slay a certain class of his fellow-beings or plunder their lands and wealth, and this act in itself would raise his soul to heaven.”⁷³

The first reaction to this onslaught was a retreat of Hinduism into its shell. Under the abnormal conditions of wholesale persecution and massacre created by some of the Muslim rulers there was a two-fold reaction. One was a hardening of orthodoxy and a growing rigidity of forms of religious behaviour and caste rules. The other was resignation to fate or absorption in the contemplation of the Absolute or God. On the cultural level there was an interaction between Hinduism and Islam and monotheistic creeds and practices gained considerable ground among the masses of the people.⁷⁴ Religion tended to be overlaid with empty and meaningless ritualism and the world-view clouded with dark streaks of pessimism. Out of the monotheistic ferment rose saint poets like Ramananda and Kabir, Guru Nanak and Chaitanya. Kabir frankly scoffed at the air of false resignation and sanctity worn by many and laughed at the yogi who wore a great beard and matted locks and looked “like a goat”.⁷⁵ Kabir accepts the “here-and-now as a means of representing supernal qualities”.⁷⁶ For him the universe is of three orders namely Becoming, Being and that which is “more than Being”, God.⁷⁷ Says he: “He is dear to me indeed who can call back the wanderer to his home. In the home is the true union, in the home is the enjoyment of life; why should I forsake my home and wander in the forest?”⁷⁸ At another place he asks, “The world of man dances in laughter and tears. Why put on the robe of the monk

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 145

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 143

⁷⁴ See Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, pp. 137-42

⁷⁵ R. Tagore (trans.) *Songs of Kabir*, pp. 14, 70-71; 87-8; 91, 109-10; 118-21

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87

and live aloof from the world in lonely pride?"⁷⁹ Passionately he cries "More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world".⁸⁰ For him, as he puts it, "The creature is Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature; they are ever distinct, yet ever united."⁸¹ Nanak, who was deeply influenced by the teachings of Kabir, urged upon his fellowmen a life of purity rather than ritual. Kabir (1440-1518) and Nanak (1469-1538) were outstanding symbols of the resurgence of monotheism and created a temper that tended to bridge the sectarian gulf separating one community from another. While the devotional reaction of a fervent monotheism was in progress the old concept of gloom persisted throughout the medieval period. The mood felt by the Chandella Devavarman (1050-1060) was somewhat indicative of this. In a copperplate inscription of the period there is the following statement: "Realizing that life is like the womb of Rambha, and that fortune is tremulous like lightening and having learnt from the Srutis that life is like a bubble of water, and youth is like a drop of water on a blade of grass and that, as one lives but a short time, there is no satisfaction in passion; and reflecting for a long time that Dharma (religion) is the only friend, for if the hundred years of men's lives are measured out, half are taken by the night, and of this half another half passes in childhood, and the rest is taken up by the preoccupations of sickness, old age and death; since life is transitory as a wave of water, whence is there happiness for living beings?"⁸² A historian of the dynasty of the Chandellas remarks in this context that "the doctrine, that life is impermanent and achievements in earthly life are insignificant, is not new in Indian inscriptions. But this inscription of Devavarman does not merely mention this fact in passing according to the usual convention, but it definitely strikes a note of pessimism and despair, and shows that the king lacks confidence in life."⁸³ It is true that references to the impermanence of life on earth are a common sentiment in several inscriptions and in literature but the point to be noted is that this literary convention is scarcely to be found in an earlier period. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta, for instance, does not sound such a pessimistic note; on the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50⁸² *Epigraphia Indica*, XX, p. 127⁸³ N. S. Bose, *History of the Chandellas*, p. 73

other hand it conveys an exultant note, glorying in the many victories the Gupta monarch scored over his enemies. The mood of despair is more characteristic of a period when Hindu India was constantly threatened with devastating defeat at the hands of the Muslim invaders; and this mood brought into prominent relief the old concept of samsara as an illusion which was developed fully against the background of the failure of the ancient Indian imperial polity.

One way of rescuing the human mind from this pessimism was the tendency to seek God above everything else. That was apparent in the great Bhakti and monotheistic movements which swept over large areas of northern, eastern, western and southern India during the early and later medieval periods. With the advent of the 17th century, however, when the national monarchy Akbar attempted to set up was already in the throes of a crisis during the careers of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) the mood changed to one of militancy. The Saint poets of Maharashtra had prepared the ground for this changing mood. Dnyaneshwara (second half of the 13th century A.D.) who wrote just about the time when Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316) was delivering his hammer-blows against the kingdom of the Yadavas of Devagiri appropriately selected the *Bhagavadgita* for writing his famous commentary the *Dnyaneshwari* on it. This choice was certainly conditioned by the fact that the *Gita* is a major work on Hindu philosophy but it is possible to assume that Dnyaneshwara was also attracted by it because of its message of heroic defence of cherished spiritual and cultural values at a time when those values were threatened with extinction by an almost barbaric and depredatory imperialism of the Khiljis.⁸⁴ The saint poets of Maharashtra were not much interested in singing about the love-frolics of the milk-maids of Brindaban with Krishna; their philosophy proceeded on the assumption that life here is as significant as life hereafter. The culmination of this line of thinking came with Ramdas (1601-1681) who expounded the political philosophy on which the grand edifice of Maratha independence was built by Shivaji (1627-1680).⁸⁵ Ramdas preached a militant philosophy and created a chain of monastic centres devoted to the

⁸⁴ See *Dnyaneshwari*, I, 77 where he refers to the power of the *Gita* to activate even the dead

⁸⁵ G. S. Sardesai, *A New History of the Marathas*, I, pp. 275-6

regeneration of the people to rouse them to fight for their rights as a free people dedicated to the preservation of their own religion and culture. He popularized the worship of Hanumana, the God of Strength all over Maharashtra and had a major share in creating a temper conducive to national revival. There is no trace of defeatism in the thought of Ramdas and the trend towards world-affirmation once again occupies an honoured position.

VIII

With the advent of the West the first reaction was that of defeat. The conquest of the land by the British produced an initial mood of despondency which later turned into that of imitation of the West. This mood, however, quickly changed. There was a resurgence of pride in the national heritage. The symbol of this resurgence is Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902), the foremost disciple of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The order of Swami Ramakrishna was committed to the philosophy of the Vedanta though Swami Vivekananda stressed the positivistic attitude much more than other aspects like Maya. Speaking after his visit to Japan in 1893 the Swami advised Indian students to study closely how Japan had forged ahead in the world. He stressed the importance of *karmayoga*, purposeful action in the world and strove hard for the regeneration of the Hindus in the mental, moral and religious areas of life.

That the philosophy of pessimism was rapidly receding into the background is amply indicated by the world-view of eminent thinkers and leaders of modern India. For Tagore, for instance, pessimism is a "mere pose, either intellectual or sentimental; but life itself is optimistic; it wants to go on. Pessimism is a form of mental dipsomania, it disdains healthy nourishment, indulges in the strong drink of denunciation, and creates an artificial dejection which thirsts for a stronger draught."⁸⁶ Similarly Sri Aurobindo preaches the message of Shakti and speaks of the Superman. Though he argues about the decisive role of the will of God in every historical happening he is far from the concept of withdrawal from the world.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ R. Tagore, *Sadhana*, pp. 52ff

⁸⁷ See *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, XLII, Pts III & IV; pp. 377-88; XLIII, Pts. I & II; pp. 80-105

Mahatma Gandhi may be described as a "saint in action" The *Gita* deeply influenced his thoughts and actions and though he interpreted the text to support his own theory of non-violence he could not but be affected by the ideal of the Karmayogi enunciated in the work Of man's work in life he says "Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God, and all his activities, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour, simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it This can only be done by service of all I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity My countrymen are my nearest neighbours They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate myself on serving them If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave I would proceed there immediately But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity"⁸⁸ Gandhi, then, accepts the world as real and if he finds that it is full of defects he has enough faith in humanity to encourage him to undertake efforts to attempt to make it as flawless as possible with the help of his unique methods

For Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ardent supporter of Shankara as he is, the world is not only real but is in a situation that cries for immediate and sustained action so that it may not perish through its own vast accumulation of power He does not subscribe to escapism For him "the world is not an illusion, it is not nothingness, for it is willed by God and therefore is real Its reality is radically different from the being of absolute God Absolute alone has non-created divine reality, all else is dependent, created reality This is the significance of the doctrine of Maya It does not mean that the temporal process is a tragedy or an aberration The reality of the world is not in itself but it is in the thought and being of the Creator It is what God thought and willed it to be before it was"⁸⁹ Radhakrishnan has given a new interpretation of Shankara's position especially in regard to the concept of Maya and has forcefully argued that Vedanta does not mean a withdrawal from the world, as is commonly supposed, but means a more perfect integration with the world

⁸⁸ *Harijan*, August 29, 1936 .

⁸⁹ P A Schilpp, *Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p 41

Jawaharlal Nehru reflects the scientific temper of modern India. For him the world is very much alive; it is also, so far as India's case may show, very wretched but not hopeless. He is in the least affected by concepts like the reality of the world and its misery and the world as an illusion. He is not the one to be lost in the contemplation of the Absolute and regard the world of *samsara* as Maya or illusion. For him the poverty of the Indian masses is as real as their dignity in that poverty is significant. His Socialist temper makes him impatient with theories of Brahman and Atman for, for him the sight of numerous industrial plants producing abundant wealth for the hungry and underprivileged millions of India is much more worthwhile as a reward in life.⁹⁰ Inevitably he is the symbol of modern India, impatient of any talk of withdrawal or inability to face the challenges of the times.

IX

We have passed under review various aspects of the Indian world-view as they appeared from time to time. The survey covered a long period, a period which was a movement in time characterized by numerous changes in political and economic conditions and vicissitudes of fortune for the Indian people. At the outset we noticed that there was not one, as in commonly supposed, but three distinct concepts. One was the old Vedic idea of the world as a reality which is full of promise of gain and happiness. The other is that of the world as a reality full of misery and sorrow. And the third is that of the world as an illusion. All the three were present at all stages of the historical evolution of the Indian people. The prominence of one view over another, as we have endeavoured to indicate, was linked with the historical situation of the time. It is wrong to assume that the old Vedic world-view was completely and totally submerged in later ages, for the world-view of a Jawaharlal Nehru has many close affinities with the Vedic view albeit with many philosophical subtleties and sophistications surrounding it. The view of Gandhi, likewise, is essentially that of the *Gita* which was propounded as far back as the period 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 while the view that the world is an illusion was also in vogue from time to time. We also saw that

⁹⁰ J. Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, pp. 269-75

the last view was very much linked with periods of crises, political, economic and social in the history of India. Is it legitimate to ask whether another period of crisis will give renewed life to that view? The answer has necessarily to be in the negative for the simple fact that though crises produced pessimism there have been different reactions to crises. The most noteworthy example is that of Maratha history. There is no reason, at least apparent reason, why Ramdas should have reacted to Muslim tyranny the way he did. The saint poets of northern India and Bengal, however, reacted in a pessimistic way. But the significant fact is that he did. Another fact to be borne in mind is that which concerns the impact of more than 100 years of the Western influence on Indian thinking. That impact primarily came through Britain and though the British period of Indian history is a mere episode in the long chronicle of India's past, the impact of the West is an indelible impress on the Indian mind. It is possible that the Indian mind may be tempted to welcome being lost in the contemplation of the Absolute but there is little likelihood of samsara being regarded as an illusion. Nor is there much possibility of samsara being looked upon as nothing more than misery pure and simple. The argument that there will be a gradual, and eventually a total, loss of faith in the Absolute is not supported by the past history of several centuries. In times past several situations were so critical that the reaction could have been one of such total loss. But that did not happen. The most reasonable conclusion, therefore, seems to be that the Indian mind, if there is such an entity, will continue to hold fast to its belief in the Absolute but with the difference that this world is as real and joyful (*Anandamaya*) as the Absolute.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RAJA KALASYA KARANAM

Authority and Freedom

In the preceding pages an attempt was made to examine some of the leading ideas on ethical, social, spiritual and economic behaviour in India. It was seen that the history of these ideas in India revealed a parallel growth of widely divergent concepts which appeared to dominate thinking at various periods of time and that such influence was often linked with the occurrence of certain far-reaching changes in economic and social conditions of the people. In this chapter we will subject to an examination some of the concepts which influenced the political behaviour of the Indian people through the ages. Among these concepts the attitude towards the state and the concept of freedom are the most important for, as we shall see, they often appear in an antithetical role. The recurring social and economic crises invariably led to the strengthening of authority. It was in the very nature of these crises also to lead to a simultaneous widening of the intervening areas between the state and the individual in the direction of an extension of autonomy in the village and regional polities. It is customary to refer to the organization of the state in India, and the Orient generally, as one of despotism, and attempts have been made to explain this despotism in terms of control over water and other material resources of the people by a restricted group of persons comprising the state.¹ The importance of generalizations as a convenient instrument for easy categorization is obvious but such generalizations also contain equally obvious weaknesses. Historical situations are processes and are seldom static and as they change along with them concepts and practices also change. Another point, too, must be borne in mind and that is an excessive reliance on one kind of textual material often proves misleading for whereas the texts express idealized positions the reality may, frequently be quite different. It is, therefore, necessary, to balance

¹ See for example Karl A. Wittvogel, *Oriental Despotism*, Chapter VII, pp. 260 ff

theoretical reflections against actual conditions as reflected in the historical records of the times. Finally, it is necessary to exercise a degree of caution in applying terms and concepts like theocracy, despotism and democracy, which arose in historically different situations, to conditions of the historical evolution of India influenced by different economic, social and religious circumstances and thought.

Specifically our interest in this chapter will be focussed on examining material to answer certain questions like (a) what was the origin of the state? (b) what were its nature and functions? (c) what constituted its authority and what was the extent of that authority, (d) did that authority leave any freedom of action for the individual? and (e) did the individual have any rights at all, rights which were valid for all time and did he have the right, above all to change the state through revolution if necessary?

The period covered in this chapter, as elsewhere in this work, is long, beginning with the Indus Civilization in the third millennium before Christ and ending with the Constitution of the Republic of India adopted by the Indian Constituent Assembly in 1950. During this long period there have been innumerable wars and revolutions and economic conditions have changed radically. Concepts of authority and the individual did not develop in a vacuum but had for their background these vicissitudes in the life of the country. While theory developed in a very elaborate way around the 2nd century B.C. and obtained such respect, that it was merely repeated in later ages, the texts repeating these theories of Kautilya, *Mahabharata* and Manu did not fully reflect the reality. One of the problems of investigation in the history of Indian political concepts is the persistence of ideas developed by the authorities mentioned above even in ages far removed from the conditions against the background of which these theories were first formulated. After the age of these authorities later writers merely prepared commentaries on these works and did not show much originality of thinking though, of course, there was a widening of some of these concepts in their implications by the introduction of some new ideas.² If these concepts, then, persisted without any fundamental changes they must have answered some deep urge and it will be worth our while to keep the possibi-

² For such changes see U. N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, pp. 164 ff; 399 ff

lity of this urge playing a significant role in the formulation of political concepts in the history of India.

II

The theories concerning the origin of the state fall into some three broad categories. The first, and perhaps, the earliest, is the theory explaining the origin of the state in more or less military terms. The second is that which attributes a divine origin to the state and the third has been usually described as the "contract" theory discussed in Buddhist texts. In all these theories there is a reference to the existence of a period of intense crisis as a prelude to the birth of the state. The state, it is almost insisted, was a product of a deep crisis and came about as an answer to that crisis.¹ The dominant pattern of statal organization in India has been that of monarchy though oligarchic republics were not unknown. Hence when these theories speak of the state they invariably speak in terms of kingship and in effect they offer an explanation of the origin of the institution of kingship.

In the Vedic literature there is preserved an account which tells us that once there was a great conflict between the gods and demons. The demons, being naturally crafty, fought under the leadership of a commander whereas the gods had no general to lead them effectively. Naturally the gods were repeatedly defeated. They, then, considered the causes of their defeat and concluded that if they were to be victorious against the demons they had to find a leader who would organize their forces in a disciplined way. They chose Indra (according to another version it was Soma who was so elected) and when they fought under his leadership they crushed the power of the demons. Indra, then, became the king of the gods.² The leader in war thus became the king in peace time. That the institution of kingship among the early Aryans became stabilized and strengthened under the impact of continuous wars is evident from the Vedic material. Many of the aspects of the coronation ceremony are indicative of military associations and, especially, games like chariot-racing reflect the overriding necessity of military qualities as essential to kingship. The Vedic king frequently led his armies personally and even through the later ages he was the supreme commander of the armed

¹ See *Taittiriya Brahmana*, II, 2, 2; *Jaiminiya Brahmana*, III, 152

forces. On the other hand kingship in India had no sacerdotal functions. Religion was the concern of the *Purohita*, the royal chaplain who was a Brahmana. He often accompanied the king to the battlefield and offered prayers for the victory of his patron. The king performed some sacrifices on behalf of himself, his court and subjects, but he was never the priest.⁴ In later social theory it is invariably assumed that kingship and governmental tasks were the responsibility of the Kshatriya and though Indian history knows of Brahmana kings such instances are always regarded as exceptions to the rule.⁵ Maintenance of social and economic order in peace and victory in war were the major functions of the state in India and the basis of the state was danda or force concretely expressed in some of the constituents of the state as we will see later.

The theory of divine origin is described in the *Mahabharata* and other texts. According to this theory there was a time when the state was not at all necessary for orderly human existence. Human beings were so good that each one respected the rights of the other. In this hypothetical golden age human beings lived a self-regulated life. But this state of affairs did not last long. Soon thefts, lying and aggrandizement appeared and the law of the jungle became the law of the land. In their distress human beings prayed to the Creator who framed a code of laws and sent his own son Virajas to implement it. *Matsyanyaya* (the law of the big fish swallowing the smaller ones) was then replaced by dharma (rule of law and justice). The state, thus, was created as a divine institution and this divine creation is the basis of the subjects' loyalty to it.⁶

The Buddhist theory also refers to the hypothetical golden age and the fall of man therefrom. But instead of interposing divine creation the Buddhists stated that men got together and elected one from among them (*Mahasammata*) to be their king and agreed to pay taxes to him in return for his work of imposing law and order in the realm. In the context of this theory the state arises as a contract between the rulers and the ruled with the implication that the contract becomes null and void if one of the two parties refuses to abide by its terms. Since divinity has little

⁴ A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, pp. 33 ff

⁵ Such exceptions were the Shungas, the Satavahanas, Kanvas, etc.

⁶ *Mahabharata*, XII, 58, 12-16

relevance to the cosmological theories of the Buddhists it was natural that they explained the rise of the state in purely human terms. This theory has been criticized by A. S. Altekar as "bad history and worse logic"⁷ which criticism is applicable to the divine theory as well.

Of the three theories the military origin theory was soon relegated to the background in favour of the divine origin theory while the "contract" theory was never accepted in circles other than Buddhist. Increasingly, then, the only theory that holds the field is that the state is a divine creation and must be respected as such.

What are the reasons for the wide acceptance of this theory in preference to the others? The answer to this must be sought in the changed circumstances of the times between the early Aryan period and 2nd century B.C. when the theory was firmly established. Both the military and "contract" theories have for their background small kingdoms or republics ruled by oligarchies. When the Aryan expansion in India began there was an extension in the territorial limits of the kingdoms. These were becoming geographical in place of the tribal kingdoms of old under which the bond linking the ruler with the subjects was one of tribal, ethnic and cultural affinity. The king was personally known to most of the tribal elders and there was little need to emphasize his divine origin to secure the loyalty of his subjects. With the change from tribal states to geographical or "national" states the territory of the state was much wider than before. There was also a profound change going on in the social composition of the state. In the period between the completion of the major *Upanishads* (circa 7th century B.C.) and the rise of the imperial state (3rd century B.C.) there was going on the process of the destruction of the tribal oligarchies which created conditions of intense crisis for the tribal society. There was also the inclusion of non-Aryan elements in the social framework and the old tribal bond was practically drained of its strength. There was, thus, need for devising a new basis of loyalty to the state and this could be conveniently done by attributing a divine origin to the institution. Sacerdotalism was also growing rapidly and it was in the interests of the priestly class to subscribe to the divine origin theory as it gave them a share, through the performance of ritual indicating

⁷ Altekar, *op. cit.*, p. 15

divine connection, in the affairs of the state. But the growth of the divine theory did not lead to the emergence of a theocratic state in the accepted sense of the term. The aims of the state were the furtherance of the first three ideals of life namely dharma, artha and kama and it is significant that moksha was excluded from the direct jurisdiction of the state. The Brahmanas at no time formed a church and in the absence of such organization the relationship between the priest and the state was, more or less, based on individuals and personalities rather than institutions.

The divine theory naturally led to the consolidation of the powers of the state. This divinity was interpreted not in personal but institutional terms. There was the dread of anarchy which made the state an absolute necessity and the state, based on danda or force needed to be moralized if it was going to be prevented from becoming an irrational and brute force. The divine theory was, thus, an attempt at moralizing the power of the state. The state was divine but divinity was associated with the person of the king only in a functional way. So long as he acted according to the dictates of dharma the king had to be respected and obeyed; but when he ceased to abide by the rules of dharma he could no longer claim that divinity. Later we will see how this reasoning led to the acceptance of the right to revolution as a distinct political concept by ancient Indian political theorists.

The deification of the institution of kingship though firmly established only in the 2nd century B.C. went much farther back into antiquity as a process. In the *Rig Veda* the king is called Indra's companion and *ardha-deva* or semi divine.⁸ In the *Atharva Veda* King Parikshita is described as a god⁹ and in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* a king is called the representative of Prajapati.¹⁰ In later literature this line of reasoning is carried to its logical conclusion implying that the king "derives his authority by virtue of the divine purpose of his creation and because his office is the symbol of that of the divine ruler."¹¹ Householders are exhorted not to speak evil of the gods or the king.¹² Manus credits the king with functions of eight distinct deities. These are: his Indra-function when he bestows benefits on the kingdom;

⁸ *Rig Veda*, III, 38, 4; IV, 22, 6-7; 42, 8-9; X, 173, 174

⁹ *Atharva Veda*, XX, 127, 7 ¹⁰ *Shatapatha Brahmana*, V, 4, 4, 5

¹¹ *Vashishta Dharmasutra*, XIX, 8

¹² *Apastamba Dharmasutra*, II, 11, 28, 13; also I, 11, 31, 5

his Sun-function when he collects taxes like the Sun drinking up the waters with his rays; his Wind-function when he sends his spies everywhere; his Yama-function when he controls his subjects; his Varuna-function when he punishes the wicked; his Moon-function when he gladdens the hearts of his subjects; his Fire-function when he destroys the criminal and the wicked; and his Earth-function when he supports all his subjects.¹³ During the coronation ceremony gods like Agni, Savitru and Brihaspati were supposed to enter the person of the king and his performance of sacrifices like the Ashvamedha and Vajapeya enabled him to secure a status equal to that of the gods.¹⁴ Manu avers that a king is made from particles obtained from the bodies of the divine guardians of the eight quarters¹⁵ and the *Puranas* state that several divinities reside in the person of the king.¹⁶

At what point of time did the divine theory obtain complete acceptance and constant application? That this was not Asoka's view of kingship is borne out by his inscriptions. It is generally assumed that the ideas of Kautilya influenced the structure of the Mauryan state as developed in the reign of Chandragupta (324-300 B.C.). While it is true, as is pointed out by U. N. Ghoshal, that "a truly philosophical theory of the king's relation to his subjects is wanting in Kautilya's work"¹⁷ he does not hesitate to use the concept of the king's parity with Indra and Yama to reinforce the authority of the king in an attempt to enforce implicit and total obedience to his rule on the part of his subjects.¹⁸ We have no means of knowing whether the first Maurya emperor actually believed that he was divine since no inscription belonging to this period is available. Megasthenes describes the pomp and pageantry surrounding the Maurya court and the elaborate precautions taken to guard the king's person and this is supported by the *Arthashastra*.¹⁹ Zimmer states that the *Arthashastra* depicts the world of "a lonely monarch dictator, supported by a vast and costly machine and a monstrous system of secret espionage and police which included informants, prostitutes,

¹³ Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 14

¹⁴ *Shatapatha Brahmana*, XII, 4, 4, 3; *Taittiriya Brahmana*, XVIII, 10, 10

¹⁵ *Manavadharma Shastra*, VII, 5, 4

¹⁶ See *Vishnu Purana*, I, 13-14; *Bhagavata Purana*, IV, 13, 23

¹⁷ Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 117

¹⁸ *Arthashastra*, I, 13

¹⁹ R. C. Majumdar, and A. D. Pusalkar, *History and Culture of the Indian People*, II, *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 66-7

sycophants, thugs, sham ascetics and professional poisoners; a terrible organization similar to that described by the Greek historians in their accounts of basileus of ancient Persia, 'the king of kings'.²⁰ Such a statement stems from equating what Kautilya has written with the reality as it obtained in the reign of Chandragupta. If such a monstrous state of affairs ever actually existed at that time it would have reflected itself in the life of the people. Megasthenes observes that "the inhabitants, in like manner, having abundant means of subsistence, exceed in consequence the ordinary statute, and are distinguished by their proud bearing"²¹ which is quite different from the picture of a people completely crushed by a police-state. The inscriptions of Asoka tell us how the king was actively interested in the economic and moral welfare of his subjects as he looked upon them as his "children".²² He does not call himself a god nor does he use any high-sounding titles. But soon after the break-up of the empire there began the influence of the political and social theories of the *Dharma-shastras* and the intrusion of Persian and Central Asian ideas on kingship. The Kushans (100 B.C.-A.D 200 ?) used grandiloquent titles which they borrowed from the Persian, Hellenistic and Chinese cultural traditions.²³ The trend, inherent in Indian tradition, was reinforced by these traditions and the result is reflected in the inscriptions of the Imperial Guptas. Samudra Gupta is described, in his Allahabad Pillar Inscription, as a "god dwelling on earth; being a mortal only in celebrating the rites of the observances of mankind."²⁴ This becomes almost a stereotype in later inscriptional literature and the divinity of kingship is invariably taken for granted. In early mediaeval ages the king is called Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha, three of the highest gods of the Hindu pantheon, all in one²⁵ and it is pointed out that a king should not be blamed or reviled or slighted or abused because the gods themselves move about on earth in the form of kings.²⁶ Honouring and obeying the ruler are the divine and human obliga-

²⁰ H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, p. 94

²¹ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *op. cit.*, p. 67

²² Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, p. 95

²³ R. C. Majumdar, and A. S. Altekar, *A New History of the Indian People*, VI, *The Vakataka-Gupta Age*, p. 269

²⁴ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *The Classical Age*, p. 15

²⁵ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 238

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236

tions of the people²⁷ and with the formulation of such ideas the process of deification of kingship was almost complete.

In Islamic theory there could be no question of attributing divinity to the sultan. Muslim thinkers, however, "consider the tendency to anarchy an inherent defect in human nature, a destructive weakness of the human race" which makes the state "a Canonical necessity".²⁸ The Caliph was the representative of the Prophet and was the supreme ruler of the Islamic world. The local rulers derived their authority to rule over the areas under their charge through the process of delegation of authority symbolized by the ceremony of investiture by the Caliph. With the decline of the Caliphate the local rulers became independent though the fiction of ruling on behalf of the Caliph was kept alive for a long time. It ended with the foundation of the Mughal empire. Akbar's court chronicler Abul Fazl, speaks of the emperor as almost divinely inspired and the institution of several ceremonies like the celebration of the emperor's birthday, especially weighing, helped create an aura round the institution of kingship. It was only with the emergence of the British state in India that there started the process of the secularization of the state; the closing decades of the 19th century saw the rise of democratic ideas which insisted that the authority of the state must rest on the consent of the governed.

III

The nature and functions of the state as understood in ancient India are succinctly put by Bhishma in the *Mahabharata*. He says that the state is "the foundation of individual security, (comprising the security of person and property) as well as the stability of the social order, the basis of the great institutions of family and property, the support of the fundamental law of the social order and the guarantee of the normal functioning of the social, the economic and the religious activities of the people."²⁹ As Altekar states the "state in ancient India was regarded as centre of society and the chief instrument of its welfare and hence it was permitted to have a wide sphere of activity. Individual liberty did not appreci-

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ I. H. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, pp. 41-3

²⁹ See Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 199

ably suffer in consequence, primarily because the state discharged its multifarious functions not exclusively through its own bureaucracy.”³⁰ The three main functions of the state were the promotion of the three ideals of life, namely that of dharma, artha and kama. It stood between anarchy and order; its constant function was to ensure that the forces of disorder were kept under check which meant that the state was responsible for peace, order, security and justice.³¹ It strove to maintain the institutions of property and family, to support religion and culture. The term dharma, as we saw in the second chapter, came to mean the rules of behaviour in the caste, family, region, time, stages of life and humanity and it was the function of the state to impose those codes of behaviour as were laid down by the *shruti*, the *smṛiti*, immemorial custom and general demands of individual and social order and progress. These had laid down that the various castes should follow specified occupations and the state had to impose these conditions on the population. If these rules contained inequity and injustice for certain sections of the population, as they did in the case of the Shudra generally and the Vaishya occasionally, the state strove little to eliminate them. Between the end of the Vedic period (700 B.C. ?) and the Maurya state (324 B.C.) the area of state activities increased enormously with the acceptance of the state's responsibility in respect of the three ideals. The state had to prevent a mixture of castes and to ensure that the system of ashramas was followed by the people entitled to follow it in its due order. It could thus prevent people from joining the monastic order in the prime of life and interrupt economic activities. “The activity of the state” observes A. S. Altekar, “was to embrace the whole of human life, both here and hereafter. The state was to offer facilities to religions and sects to develop on their own lines and foster and inculcate piety, morality and righteousness. It was to improve the social order and to encourage learning, education and art by subsidizing learned academies and extending patronage to scholars and artists. It was to establish and maintain rest houses, charity halls and hospitals and relieve the distress due to floods, locusts, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. It was to see that the population was evenly distributed and encourage colonization of fresh lands. It was to enrich the resources of the country by developing

³⁰ Altekar, *op. cit.*, p. 37

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29

forests, working mines and constructing dams and canals in order to make agriculture independent of rain as far as possible. It was to offer active help to trade and industry, but also to protect the population against capitalistic selfishness, if merchant princes sought to corner the market and raise prices. It was to regulate the vices of the community by appointing its own officers to supervise wine booths, dice halls and prostitutes."³² The *Arthashastra* gives us a detailed picture of the governmental machinery of the times and the number of inspectors and departments is as much a tribute to the ingenuity of Kautilya as it is a reflection of the extensive area of public life covered by the activities of the state. Asoka appointed the *dharmamahamatras* to supervise public morality and that institution was continued afterwards by the imperial Guptas during whose time the officers were known as *Vinayasthuthapakas*. Asoka had hospitals built for men and animals, medicinal plants planted, roads constructed, rest-houses built, wells dug, shade-giving trees planted and a host of other things done for public welfare.³³ This was a general tradition of benevolent kingship and was followed by most of the kings of ancient India.

Though the general aims of the Islamic state were similar to the state of ancient India there were significant differences also. These functions are expressed in the following terms: "The Sultan controls affairs, maintains rights, enforces the criminal code; he is the Pole Star round whom revolve the affairs of the world and the Faith; he is the protection of God in his realm; his shadow extends its canopy over His servants, for he forbids the forbidden, helps the oppressed, uproots the oppressor and gives security to the timid."³⁴ Specifically the functions of the Islamic state were "(i) to protect the Faith, as defined by *ijma*; (ii) to settle disputes between his subjects; (iii) to defend the territories of Islam and to keep the highways and roads safe for travellers; (iv) to maintain and enforce the criminal code; (v) to strengthen the frontiers of Muslim territory against possible aggression; (vi) to wage a holy war against those who act in hostility to Islam; (vii) to collect the rates and taxes; (viii) to apportion the shares of those who deserve an allowance from the public treasury; (ix) to appoint officers to help in his public and legal duties; and (x) to

³² *Ibid.*, p. 36

³³ See Pillar Edict VII

³⁴ Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p. 49

keep in touch with public affairs and the condition of the people by personal contact.”³⁵ The one important difference between the avowed duties of the state in ancient India and the Muslim state lies in the latter’s obligation to wage Holy War or *jihad* against the non-Islamic lands. Very often this principle resulted in serious discrimination and persecution against the non-Muslims who formed the majority of the population. The Islamic state in India, thus, in pursuance of the decree to wage jihad tended to create a primary antagonism between the rulers and the ruled on the ground of difference in religion. Theoretically at least, and often in practice also, the Hindu could scarcely expect to be treated on a level with the Muslim in the eyes of the law. The unbeliever existed on sufferance and suffered many well-known penalties the best known of which was the *jizya* or the poll-tax. The sultan was an absolute autocrat, the fount of all power, the commander of the faithful and the liege-lord of the nobility. Surrounded by a sullen population the state existed on warfare, continuous and predatory, and this brought into being a parasitic class of nobles who had little share in the really productive tasks. The fanaticism of the early conquerors and bigoted despots like Alauddin Khilji, Firoze Tughlaq, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, led to numerous acts of wanton cruelty and destruction and these built a wall of bitterness and prejudice between the masses and the rulers. But great rulers like Akbar saw the dangers inherent in such policies and tried to eliminate the antagonism between the state and its subjects by attempting to create a national monarchy.

This government differed in many important respects from the state set up by the British in India in the 19th century. In the first instance the government had an intensely personal character inasmuch as it was often construed as a rule of persons rather than principles and laws. The king was the state in practice if not in theory also. There were the principles and laws, many of them as lofty as could be found anywhere else, but with these the common man did not have a constant acquaintance. Secondly, the laws themselves did not derive from the people but rested for their authority on some divine sanction or some hoary authority like tradition and custom. And the law being thus based on religious authority there were bound to be as many systems of law as there were religions in the country. Then, in spite of the

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 48-9

government being understood in narrow personal terms, it was considered to be most desirable when it was remote and left the other organs of power like the regional society and caste council ample scope for the exercise of their specific authority. A good government was one that gathered taxes, that were not too many and not too heavy, maintained an army to protect the people against aggression and gave them a sense of security and justice.³⁶

In the initial stages of the establishment of British rule in India the functions of the state were interpreted in extremely narrow terms. The first task of the new administration was to reform the systems of revenue collection and administration of justice. Individuals like Warren Hastings no doubt took an interest in the promotion of learning and culture but these were not accepted as specific governmental responsibilities. In the 30's of the 19th century, under Lord William Bentinck, an era of social reform was ushered in and later, in the time of Dalhousie the state embarked upon many other activities like setting up of the railway and the telegraph, universities, public works and the suppression of objectionable social practices. Then came the Great Revolt of 1857 and after that the British state was chary of moving into areas which affected the religions of the people. It was only in the opening decades of the present century that the British-Indian government began to move in the direction of protection to indigenous industries, extension of communications all over the country and carrying out extensive public works in famine relief. By and large the primary duties of this state were understood as the maintenance of law and order throughout the country, the maintenance of an efficient and honest civil service and a system of judicial administration based on the equality of all in the eyes of the law.

With the advent of independence there was a re-ordering of the functions of the state. The state aimed at being a welfare state and by 1950 had come to accept socialistic aims as its guiding principles. It drafted economic plans and began a gigantic effort to build anew the economic, social and cultural life of the country. It moved into industry and commerce and its activities touched even the remotest village. The ancient Indian tradition of a state that tried to do almost everything for the people was now reinforced by ideas of welfare and socialism.

³⁶ See B. G. Gokhale, *The Making of the Indian Nation*, pp. 180-4

IV

We will now turn to a consideration of the constituents of the authority of the state. The two traditional bases of the authority of the state were its divine creation and the force of custom.³⁷ As an institution that stood between anarchy and orderly progress the state was an absolute necessity and this consideration prompted writers on political organization to stress the importance of the state and insist that obedience to its laws must be both total and spontaneous.³⁸ The king derived his authority from the association with the divine which he secured through the performance of certain sacrifices and this association with the divine was a very powerful concept appealing to the large masses of the people.³⁹ The authority of the state was based on danda which meant coercive power. The concept of danda is elaborately discussed in the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthashastra*. Danda, states Kautilya "is the law of punishment or science of government. It is a means to make acquisitions, to keep them secure, to improve them and to distribute among the deserving the profits of improvement. It is on this science of government that the course of the progress of the world depends. 'Hence' says my teacher, 'whoever is desirous of the progress of the world shall ever hold the sceptre raised (*udgatadanda*). Never can there be a better instrument than the sceptre to bring people under control.' No, says Kautilya; "for whoever imposes severe punishment becomes repulsive to the people; while he who awards mild punishment becomes contemptible. But whoever imposes punishment as deserved, becomes respectable. For punishment (danda) when awarded with due consideration, makes the people devoted to righteousness and to works productive of wealth and enjoyment; while punishment, when ill-awarded under the influence of greed and anger owing to ignorance, excites fury even among hermits and ascetics dwelling in forests, not to speak of householders."⁴⁰ Kautilya, thus frankly recognizes that the basis of authority is its ability to coerce. This force or danda is also described as a mystic force which is almost a double-edged weapon. While it enables a king to rule and punish offenders it is also capable of

³⁷ Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 19

³⁸ See Majumdar and Pusalkar; *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 232

³⁹ Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 25

⁴⁰ Shamasastri, *Arthashastra*, p. 8

destroying the king if he uses it without the ends of reason and morality and justice in view.⁴¹ Danda is the ruler but a ruler higher than danda is dharma which may be understood as law. The king has no doubt very wide and sweeping powers but these powers, when examined in detail and in their working, appear to be much less sweeping. The concept of the absolute necessity of the rule of law is clearly recognized in ancient Indian political thinking.⁴² While recognizing the need for danda the assumption is that "men are predominantly evil"⁴³ and that "the whole world is kept in order by danda, for a guiltless man is hard to find, and it is through fear of danda that the whole world yields the enjoyment which it owes."⁴⁴ This is certainly a gloomy view of the natural propensities of the human species but it has at least the merit of being realistic as the history of humanity proves! Danda, says the *Mahabharata*, "rules all subjects; danda alone protects them; danda is awake when others are asleep; the wise declare danda to be identical with dharma."⁴⁵ This extract is significant as it shows that what these thinkers had in mind when they spoke of force, was not naked force but the force of law. The Buddhist texts insist that dharma is the ruler of rulers. And dharma is described as a composite tradition of justice, impartiality and benevolence and is related to the five distinct concepts of artha, dharma, kala, matra and parishad (economic good, ethics, time, measure, and counsel).⁴⁶ The king is the embodiment of dharma which is divinely created, is "the crown of the social structure completing and perfecting the divine purpose of its creation", that its authority is superior to that of the temporal ruler indicating "the supremacy of the law of the social order over its component units and that it is identical with the abstract principle of truth."⁴⁷ The parallel development of the twin concepts of danda and dharma and their final fusion into one composite political tradition were necessitated by circumstances prevailing in the country. There was need for vast powers for the state without which the divergent elements constituting the population could not be welded into an organic unity. But these vast

⁴¹ B. K. Sarkar, *Hindu Politics, The Cultural Heritage of India*, III, pp. 262 ff ⁴² Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 22 ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁴⁴ *Mahabharata*, XII, 15, 36; *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 22

⁴⁵ *Mahabharata*, XII, 15, 2

⁴⁶ *Anguttara Nikaya*, III, pp. 149, 151

⁴⁷ Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, 23

powers were liable to be abused especially in the absence of viable checks on royal absolutism. The ancient Vedic *sabhas* and *samitis* checked the power of the king very effectively so long as they lasted.⁴⁸ But with the extension in the territorial limits of the kingdoms, consequent upon Aryan expansion in the Gangetic region, these bodies ceased to play an effective part and, in Mauryan polity, were replaced by the council of ministers. But these ministers were appointed by the king and theoretically held office at the pleasure of the king though often in practice they exercised a wholesome influence on the king in the direction of moderation and justice. So there was felt the need to create a conceptual check on royal absolutism and this appeared in the development of the dharma concept. Ancient Indian thinkers felt the need for moralizing the authority of the state very keenly and the only way they felt it could be successfully done was to declare dharma as being higher than the king.

Though the king was the guardian of the law he had very little power to tamper with it or change it in any substantial way. The sources of this law were *shruti* (vedic literature); *smriti* (the law codes); *vyavahara* (custom or tradition) and the royal edicts. The king could not interfere with the sacred scriptures or with the law codes for fear of being denounced as irreligious. The force of custom was recognized to be higher even than the law-codes in certain circumstances and royal edicts had very limited scope. The king could obtain favourable interpretations of law through the learned men at his court but such interpretations could not go counter to the spirit of other sources merely to please royal vanity. Examined in this context royal absolutism was very effectively limited in its tyranny though it could not be eliminated entirely. So long as a king adhered to the spirit of dharma he could always expect implicit and absolute obedience from his subjects.

In Islamic times the despotism of the sultan was curbed by a similar concept of the supremacy of law. The Muslim thinkers believed in "the supremacy of the *Shar* and hold, that it is eternal and immutable in its essence. It is based on the Quran which is believed by every Muslim to be the Word of God revealed to His prophet Muhammad. Not even the Prophet could change the revelation; he could only explain and interpret it. His interpreta-

⁴⁸ Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40

tion, embodied in his traditions, called *hadith*, naturally commands great respect and cannot be ignored by his followers. On these two rocks—the Quran and the *hadith*—is built the structure of Muslim law, annotated, expanded, interpreted and applied to the complicated and various needs of a growing civilization by learned lawyers. This law was the actual sovereign in Muslim lands; no one was above it, and all were ruled by it.”⁴⁹ Though attempts were made from time to time to ignore some aspects of this law by interested sultans the group of theologians and jurists was always watchful of such deviations and did not fail to correct the sultan concerned even at great risk to their personal safety. The concepts of this law, then, acted as a constitutional check to the despotic powers of the Muslim ruler.

With the establishment of the Indo-British state a different concept of law began to operate. The East India Company worked under a royal charter renewed from time to time. Under the terms of these charters the powers of its officers from the Governor-General downwards were defined and regulated by conventions. The legislative enactments of the Governor-General and his council began to develop as the constitutional ground for British administration in India. After the transfer of administration from the Company to the Crown in 1857 the British Parliament became the highest constitutional authority for the governance of the Indian empire. Through the instrumentality of the British Parliament and as a result of nationalist pressure there were several steps taken by which more and more power was transferred to deliberative and legislative bodies in India. These steps could be seen in the Indian Councils Acts of 1861 and 1892, the reforms of 1909, 1919 and 1935 and finally the transfer of power to an elected Indian Constituent Assembly in 1947 which then went on to frame a constitution for the Republic of India in 1950. Under this constitution power ultimately belonged to the people of India and there existed an independent judiciary to ensure that governments did not usurp the power of the people and misuse it. The concept of the authority of the state had undergone a profound change under Western impact though in popular thinking the concept of *dharma* had not lost its validity—it had only changed its form.

⁴⁹ Qureshi, *op. cit.*, p. 42

V

We have considered so far the sources of the power of the state, the nature of its authority and the influence of the concept of the rule of law as a factor limiting the authority of the state. We will now examine whether there was any such concept as individual rights and to what extent this concept was a powerful force.

The political theorists of ancient India held out two threats against any misuse of power by the king. One was the fear of hell. A king not abiding by the dictates of ethics and justice was threatened with dire consequences in hell. The other was the threat of revolt.⁵⁰ The right to revolution is one of the clearly recognized rights of individuals and groups in Indian political thought. The *Mahabharata*⁵¹ recognizes it and Manu condones the overthrow of a wicked king as not sinful.⁵² Though from time to time there is a streak of despondency as when Shukra counsels "resignation to the will of a bad king as to the unnatural acts of parents and the inscrutable ways of providence" or suggests that "subjects may leave the land ruled by an unrighteous king and constantly frighten him by going over to his virtuous and powerful enemy" the concept of the right to revolution is acknowledged though sometimes in a hesitant manner.⁵³ For Shukra himself says in another place in his *Nitisara* that "if the king although highborn becomes averse to good qualities, policy and strength, and is unrighteous, he should be repudiated as the destroyer of the kingdom. In his place the Purohita should install a virtuous prince of his family for the protection of the subjects after approval of the latter."⁵⁴ And since the approval of the subjects is involved in this dynastic change the right to revolution stands forth as one of the most important rights of the people. Long before Shukra, Manu had stated that "the king who through folly oppresses his kingdom, (will), together with his relatives, ere long be deprived of his life and of his kingdom. As the lives of living creatures are destroyed by tormenting their bodies, even so the lives of kings are destroyed by their oppressing their kingdoms."⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Altekar, *op. cit.*, pp 69-70

⁵¹ *Mahabharata*, XIII, 96, 35; *Shukranitisara*, IV, 3. II. 274-5

⁵² *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 111-12

⁵³ *Shukranitisara*, III, 43-6; 48-9; IV, 1-3

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 274-5 ⁵⁵ *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 111-12

And such popular uprisings did take place from time to time. Vena, Nahusha, Sudasa, Sumukha and Nimi are the tyrants who are described as being killed for their wicked and unlawful actions and the Pali *Jatakas* also refer to a number of such instances.⁵⁶ But the violent overthrow of a tyrannical king was an extra-constitutional procedure and there is scarcely anything indicated in respect of a peaceful change of government in ancient Indian thought. The absence of such a remedy in the matter of curbing the authority of the state may be explained on two grounds. One was that this absolute authority, though theoretically sanctioned, could scarcely be practised because of the interposition of other forces of varying degrees of autonomy. The large extent of the country and the backward means of communication themselves set limits to the despotism of the ancient Indian state for, even if a king wanted to rule despotically he could do so only in areas which were close to the seat of royal power. Secondly, in a society dominated by religion, religious and theological sanctions generally exerted a restraining influence on the power of the state.

In this context it is of significance to note what the ancient authorities have to say about the rights of the people to bear arms. The Shudras, it must be remembered, were generally excluded from being considered as people and for them, therefore, there is no question of bearing arms at any time. Traditionally the occupation of arms was restricted to the Kshatriyas which meant, in effect, some 15 per cent of the population. The Brahmanas wielded immense religious prestige and power and the Vaishyas had economic power at their disposal. The Shudra alone was left defenceless against the state and it should be remembered that of all classes the Shudra was the most directly involved in the tasks directly productive of national wealth. The disarming of the Shudra had, thus, clear political and economic implications and led to a concentration of power in the hands of the state. And this power could scarcely be effectively challenged by the Shudras who, as a class, must be presumed to be the most numerous. In the case of the other two castes namely, the Brahmanas and the Vaishyas, the ancient works permit individuals among them to take up arms in defence of their rights.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁶ See Altekar, *op. cit.*, p. 68-9

⁵⁷ See Ghoshal, *op. cit.*, p. 54; also pp. 74-7

right to revolution, thus, was a recognized concept until the end of ancient times.

In medieval and Mughal times, too, some such concept as a right to revolution existed. The basis of the Islamic state was the Shar and if a sultan acted against the rules of the Shar the subjects incurred no sin in deposing him. That this was neither a pious wish nor a dead letter is proved by quite a few instances from the history of the times.⁵⁸ That this concept was occasionally misused by a ruler like Aurangzeb who despatched his brother Dara Shukoh (1658) in a war of succession on the ground that he was an apostate does not invalidate the significance of the concept itself. Some historical thinkers like Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) of Tunis, recognized well-regulated periods of rise stability and decline in the life of a state and attributed the decline of the state to factors like concentration of power and the growth of love of ease and luxury among the ruling classes.⁵⁹

The rise of the nationalist movement in the country in the opening decades of the present century brought the concept of the right to revolution into the arena of active politics. It was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) who gave a classic expression to this concept by declaring that "Swaraj (self-government) is my birth-right" and Mahatma Gandhi further developed the implications of this idea through his numerous writings. For instance he stated that "We must be content to die if we cannot live as free men and women" and "As every country is fit to eat, to drink and to breathe, even so is every nation fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly."⁶⁰ For him self-government was a "continuous effort to be independent of government control"⁶¹ for he viewed "an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress."⁶² His concept of Satyagraha was a fully developed philosophy of the right to revolution of a non-violent character and the vitality of the concept is revealed in the numerous satyagrahas launched since the advent of independence.

⁵⁸ Quereshi, *op. cit.*, p. 55

⁵⁹ Charles Issawi, *An Arab Philosophy of History*, pp. 122-6

⁶⁰ *Young India*, January 5, 1922; also October 15, 1931

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, August 6, 1925 ⁶² *Modern Review*, October 1935

VI

Whereas religious sanctions and the concept of right to revolution operated as a check on the power of the state through the ages in India, these were somewhat restricted in their scope by their very nature. Religious sanctions may be flouted by the state from time to time and revolution may become difficult if not impracticable except under certain circumstances. The more normal checks were to be found in the nature and constitution of the Indian society itself. This society, as we have seen elsewhere in the course of our survey, was arranged in a series of well-defined circles like the family, clan, caste, tribe, region and occupation. Each had its own controls over the individual and each acted as a buffer for the individual against the rapacity of the state. The occupational guilds which played a very significant role in the economic life of ancient India, were recognized by the state and were represented at the court through the headmen. The state was chary of interfering with the normal working of the guilds. Similarly the castes, at least many of them, had their own organizations and through these the individual's personal, ritual and social and economic life was regulated. The interposition of these between the authority of the state and the life of the individual was a very strong check on the power of the state *vis á vis* the individual. And then there was the village community which enjoyed real power. It was a multi-functional organization looking after parks and gardens, maintaining roads and tanks, fixing prices of gold and determining its quality and performing a host of other functions. The village community was the real government for the millions who lived in villages and came into contact with the state only through the headman and the taxes paid by them to the state. Once the taxes were paid the state was content to leave them alone to pursue their age-old ways in religion, social and economic life and cultural affairs.⁶³

As for the rights of the individual it is no wonder that when the whole philosophy was stated in terms of duties and responsibilities there is little in our literature of direct references to this subject. These rights are rather to be inferred from the list of duties the people had to perform. These duties covered family, clan, caste, village and religion and duties ordained by them. In

⁶³ B. G. Gokhale, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-9

the broad sense the individual had the right to expect protection of life and property and get justice in the law-courts. He also had the right to perform his pre-ordained social and religious duties without let or hindrance and very often the state itself was called upon by the laws of the country to ensure that these duties were properly performed. The individual in India was finely enmeshed in a web of duties and responsibilities and the whole social philosophy was oriented towards these rather than spelt out in terms of individual rights. It was only after the beginning of the Western impact in the 19th century that the concept of individual rights gained prominence. The first significant change was indicated by the concept of equality of all persons in the eyes of the law which directly cut across the old concept of tribal and caste law. The concept of individual property also aided the growth of the concept of individual rights and this was further developed on the gradual break-up of the joint family. Under the impact of Western ideas, then, the concept of individual rights grew rapidly and the culmination of this development came in the enshrinement of these rights in the Constitution of the Republic of India adopted in 1950. This Constitution has a section on Fundamental Rights such as right to equality, right to freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement, residence, property, occupation and personal liberty.⁶⁴ These indicate a revolutionary change in the concept of freedom and individual rights and though one may seek indigenous background for this change it can best be understood in the context of more than a century of Western impact on Indian thinking and events. The individual has come into his own now and the philosophy of duties is being gradually transformed into a bill of rights. That the old philosophy of duties still has vital force is indicated in the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi who expresses the thought of the common Indian when he says "the true source of rights is duty. If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek."⁶⁵

VII

We have traced above a brief history of the concepts of authority and freedom in India. Speculation on this subject has had a long

⁶⁴ *Constitution of India*, Pt. III, Sections 14-35

⁶⁵ *Young India*, January 8, 1925

continuity for the problem has been vital. Theoretically throughout the long period of ancient and medieval, as well as Mughal India, it was assumed that authority would be of a paternalistic kind and that the allegiance of the subjects to the ruler would be as spontaneous as that of sons towards fathers. Indian law had given the father wide powers of chastisement as well as reward for his sons and that concept was translated, more or less, in political terms when the thinkers had to deal with problems concerning the relationships between the rulers and the ruled. There was the dread of anarchy which brought home to the people the utter necessity of the continued existence of the state for it was believed that an inefficient state was better than no state at all. It was the state that stood as a guardian of peace and order, law and justice and protected the people against external aggression. No doubt, the family and the caste were important but these depended for their very existence on the state which was charged with the task of enforcing their rules and laws.⁶⁶ The state was given a very active role to play in social affairs for it was declared that it is the king that makes the age and not *vice versa*.⁶⁷ Over and above its normal functions, ancient Indian thought envisaged certain well-defined moral functions for the state and for this it was insisted upon that the state itself should be a moral institution.⁶⁸ The state was the protector of the property of the people and this it could do only if the king desisted the temptation of becoming the great expropriator himself.⁶⁹ To compel him to conform to the rules of morality the fear of hell was constantly dinne~~d~~d into his mind by the religious and political texts which formed the staple of his education as a prince.⁷⁰ That from time to time the process of great expropriation went on cannot be denied and this has been indicated in the chapter on Artha. But that was the basis of the economic organization of India whereby a small group of Kshatriyas and Brahmanas combined, to sweep off the surplus from the hands of the classes most directly involved in the work of producing the bulk of the national wealth. In Muslim times these classes comprised the sultan or the emperor,

⁶⁶ Beni Prasad, *Theory of Government in Ancient India*, pp. 30-31

⁶⁷ *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, LXIX, 79

⁶⁸ Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-45

⁶⁹ *Mahabharata*, Anushasana Parva, LXI, pp. 68-9 (Roy's Translation)

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Shanti Parva, XC, 4-6, 10-16; also XCII, 6-19

his nobles and his army. If there was any freedom for the individual it was to be enjoyed by him within the framework of the economic system. But within that system there was sufficient scope for him to enjoy a degree of freedom. It was, insisted upon, for instance, that the state should not interfere with the special customs of families and regional societies.⁷¹ And for the large majority of the people what was immediately vital was society more than the state, as was pointed out by Rabindranath Tagore when he said that "India's heart is in *society*, not in the state." The poet then adds that whereas the "West looks to the state for solution of every problem, India knows and recognizes the society only." The function of the state is war, justice and protection, the function of society is religion, education, sanitation, agriculture and many other aspects of life.⁷² That this was the attitude in ancient India is stated by Beni Prasad who observes that "Sovereignty was really diffused throughout the community and was embodied in the Law which had its ultimate source in the Divine Will. On the part of the individual there can be no unified allegiance, no single loyalty, except to society as a whole. No component part, not even government, can claim to be absolute sovereign. Here the monistic theory of sovereignty as applied to the state or government, fails completely, only a pluralistic theory can grasp the Indian phenomena."⁷³ It was against this pluralism forced by circumstances—geographical, technological, economic, social and cultural—that the theorists struggled and exhorted men to offer implicit obedience to the state. There was an obvious reason for this insistence as it was motivated by the legitimate fear that what needed bolstering up was not the authority of the society which was plainly visible all around but the sovereignty of the state which tended to be merged into the ubiquitous powers of the various circles through which the life of the people was constantly regulated.⁷⁴ The theory of the divinity of the king arose as a necessity due to the extension of the territorial limits of the ancient kingdom, and the inclusion of heterogeneous elements which tended to make Indian social organization pluralistic. These pluralistic elements could be given a conceptual and practical unity only through the expedient of the elevation of the king to the

⁷¹ *Ibid*, LXXXVIII, 14, IXXV 19

⁷² Sen Sochin, *Political Philosophy of Rabindranath* pp 35 6

⁷³ Beni Prasad *op cit*, p 9

⁷⁴ See chapter on Dharma

status of a semi-divine being so long as he functioned as a righteous monarch. His powers were wide, his prerogatives numerous and his person inviolate.⁷⁵ But this held only so long as the characteristic of morality was not divested from the actual behaviour of the king for, as we have seen, Indian thought duly recognized the right to revolution on the part of the people under certain circumstances.

That the subjects enjoyed a wide degree of freedom and that rulers, by and large, did conform to the high ideals set up for them is indicated by historical evidence. Megasthenes speaks of the life of the people in Mauryan India under conditions which were not oppressive in spite of the frightful picture conveyed by the rules of the *Arthashastra*.⁷⁶ For Gupta India we have the evidence of the Chinese traveller Fa Hien. He says that the people "have not to register their households or attend to any magistrates and their rules. . . . If they want to go, they go; if they want to stay, they stay. . . . The king governs without decapitation or other corporeal punishment. Criminals are simply fined lightly or heavily according to the circumstances of each case."⁷⁷ In the 7th century A.D. Hiuen Tsiang noticed that "In their rules of government there is remarkable rectitude, whilst in their behaviour there is much gentleness and sweetness. With respect to criminals or rebels, these are few in number and only occasionally troublesome. When the laws are broken or the power of the ruler violated, then the matter is clearly sifted and the offenders imprisoned. There is no infliction of corporal punishment, they are simply left to live or die, and, are not counted among men. When the rules of propriety or justice are violated, or when a man fails in fidelity or filial piety, then they cut his nose or his ears off, or his hands and feet, or expel him from the country or drive him out into the desert wilds. For other faults, except these, a small payment of money will redeem the punishment."⁷⁸

The Islamic invasions introduced an era of wide-spread destruction and plunder in many areas of the country. Much of this violence wore off, however, when the Muslim state was well-established and the concept of the state acting on the precepts

⁷⁵ *Mahabharata*, Anushasana Parva, XXII, 121

⁷⁶ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 67-8

⁷⁷ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *The Classical Age*, p. 346

⁷⁸ S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, pp. 83-4

of the Islamic political theory held sway. Though the rules of Jihad involved a second-class citizenship for non-Muslims and resulted in a curtailment of many of their traditional customs, rights and privileges these rules could neither be strictly enforced at all times nor could they be implemented in all areas. In many instances, therefore, the theological bark was worse than the royal bite. Emperors like Akbar initiated new policies of religious toleration and administrative reorganization and ushered in eras of peace and order restoring the balance in favour of a considerable degree of individual and group freedom. Even a bigot like Aurangzeb expressed lofty ideals of kingship as is evidenced by a statement reported by Bernier. Aurangzeb is reported to have said: "I was sent into the world by Providence to live and labour, not for myself, but for others; that it is my duty not to think of my own happiness, except so far as it is inseparably connected with the happiness of my people. It is the repose and prosperity of my subjects that it behoves me to consult; nor are they to be sacrificed to anything besides the demands of justice, the maintenance of the royal authority, and the security of the state."⁷⁹ On the other hand, Careri reports in the following wise: "The Great Mogul is so absolute, that there being no written laws, his Will in all things is Law, and the last decision of all Causes, both Civil and Criminal. He makes a Tyrannical use of this absolute Power; for being Lord of all the Land, the Princes themselves have no certain place of abode, the King altering it at Pleasure; and the same with the poor Peasants who have sometimes the Land they have cultivated taken from them, and that which is untilld given them in lieu of it; besides that they are obliged every year to give the King three parts of the Crops. He never admits any Body into his Presence, empty-handed; and sometimes refuses admittance to draw a greater Present. For this reason the *Omrahs* and *Nahabs* appointed to govern the Provinces, oppress the People in the most miserable manner imaginable."⁸⁰ The truth, obviously, lay somewhere between the idealistic position stated by Aurangzeb and the somewhat exaggerated remarks of Careri. It cannot be denied that from time to time there was a wide-spread interference in the lives of the subjects on the part of the state Hindu as well as

⁷⁹ I. Brock, *Travels in the Mogul Empire* by Francis Bernier, I, p. 145

⁸⁰ S. N. Sen, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, pp. 240-41

Muslim. For Vijayanagar T. V. Mahalingam's observations are significant when he says that "At no time did the State in India interfere with the private life of the citizens as in the medieval period. The assumption of the title, *the maintainer of the castes*, by Vijayanagar kings and the appointment of the *samayacharyas* indicate fully the vigour with which the kings enforced *svadharma* on the respective castes and communities in India."⁸¹ But this was in accordance with the concept of dharma which was an integral part of the theory of the state in India until modern times. Asoka, Samudra Gupta, Harsha and a host of others have put on record their solicitude for following the precepts of dharma.⁸² Likewise the Muslim rulers were called upon to implement the ordinances of Islam throughout their realm. If the ancient Indian kings appointed the Dharmamahamatras, Vinayasthitisthapakas and Samayacharyas for enforcing the rules of dharma in the lives of the people the Muslim rulers contrived to do likewise through the offices of the *Sadr* and the *Muhtasib*. Such actions on the part of the state were regarded as normal and it was not until recent times that the concept of the inviolateness of the private life of the citizen in the moral sphere arose and secured a place of importance in the concept of individual freedom. In sum, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the Indian, in comparison with his fellow beings elsewhere, enjoyed a degree of freedom within the limitations imposed by the concept of authority so essential for the continuance of conditions of peace and order. The king made the age but in this task of making of the age the reconciliation of the claims of the state and the rights of the individual was a precondition and this was, to a large degree, successfully realized in practice, if not in theory, in India over large periods of time in the country's history.

This reconciliation was conditioned by the facts of economic and social life in the country. The despotism of the state was the result of the need for securing a constant supply of a large degree of surplus taken from the vast masses of the people involved in the process of producing wealth for paying for the expenses of the state and the maintenance of those sections that directly depended on it for their privileges. The recurrent failure

⁸¹ T. V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life Under Vijayanagar*, pp. 19-20

⁸² Ibid., p. 21; also see N. S. Bose, *History of the Candellas*, p. 118

of imperial polity in a country of continental dimensions led to the rise of theories which regarded society as of greater consequence than the state itself and this, in itself, was a great liberal force restricting the theoretical despotism of the state. Paradoxical though it may seem the plurality of social organization in India creating as it did conditions of disunity in politics led to the maintenance of degrees of individual freedom. If the authority of the state was real the freedom of the individual in most of the areas of religious, social and cultural life was no less real.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AHIMSA PARAMĀ DHARMAH

War and Non-violence

Perhaps no other single incident has produced a deep and lasting impression on the Indian mind through the ages as the Bharata War. The circumstances under which the belligerent situation developed and mounted to the mighty crescendo of the eighteen days' carnage dramatize the causes and consequences of wars. That war was not just an ordinary conflict of mutually exclusive interests but a human drama with a profound inner meaning. That inner meaning appears as the dilemma of Arjuna which is made the occasion for the *Bhagavadgita*. War is as old as humanity itself. Wars are the staple of human history and they are the themes of some of the great literary works of the world. The hymns of the *Vedas* sing of innumerable wars fought by the invading Aryans and the theme thus set by them runs like a thread through the later chronicle of Indian history. When institutionalized, war creates a distinct social class, that of the Kshatriyas, which becomes the maker of the destiny of tribes and kingdoms and empires. In the theme of war, then, the history of India is not much different from the history of other countries.

Where the difference becomes apparent, however, is in the concept of renunciation of war and recognition of non-violence as a way of life. We had occasion to notice earlier that in the history of Indian thought there is always an interplay of two opposite trends running parallel to each other throughout the ages. This appears in the case of dharma and artha, kama and sannyasa, karma and salvation. To this list may be added the twin concepts of war and its glorification and non-violence and its role in human progress. Though non-violence first appears as a reaction to the wanton and wide-spread slaughter of animals in the Vedic sacrifices the concept is rapidly widened in its scope and implications and by the sixth century B.C. becomes a vital force in the intellectual life of the country. Whereas war is accepted as a necessary evil on the collective level the concept of non-violence is treated

more on the individual plane and has more ethical than social implications. Nevertheless the idea has sufficient vitality to occasionally influence collective action as we shall see later. The purpose of the present chapter, then, is to attempt an analysis of ideas on war and non-violence as they appear through the ages and determine if there is any consistent pattern in the interplay of these antithetical themes.

II

The Aryans came into India as invaders and were necessarily involved in prolonged and often bitter warfare against the indigenous peoples whom they ultimately conquered politically. Under the circumstances war is both an accepted institution and is also glorified as such. Of the leading gods of the Vedic pantheon Indra is the recognized war-god who is implored, time and again, by his devotees to help them win victories against the hated non-Aryans. The priests are as much involved in war as is the rest of the population and one of the functions of the Purohita, the royal chaplain, was to accompany the king to the battlefield there to offer prayers for the victory of his patron. The following is a fair example of the kind of sentiment involved in Indra-worship. The poet sings of him as "thinning (his enemies) in battle, and accelerating the wheels (of his car), he turns away from him who offers no libation, and augments (the prosperity of) the offerer; Indra, the subduer of all, the formidable, the lord, conducts the Dasa at his pleasure. He proceeds to plunder the wealth of the (avaricious), and bestows the riches that are prized by man upon the donor (of the libation): every man is involved in great difficulty who provokes the might of Indra to wrath."¹ At another place there is a fine poem on a war-horse: "Rushing to glory, to the capture of herds, swooping down as a hungry falcon, eager to be first, he darts amid the ranks of the chariots, happy as a bridegroom making a garland, spurning the dust and champing at the bit. And the victorious steed and faithful, his body obedient (to the driver) in battle, speeding on through the melee, stirs up the dust to fall on his brows. And at his deep neigh, like the thunder of heaven, the foemen tremble in fear, for he fights against

¹ *Rig Veda Samhita*, (Translated by H. H. Wilson), Third and Fourth Asthakas, p. 290

thousands, and none can resist him, so terrible is his charge."² Victorious warfare being a condition of the very survival of the Aryan tribes almost every able-bodied member of the tribe had to take part in the wars whenever called upon to do so. Each settlement had a stockade and the *vishas* functioned as fortified pioneer settlements constantly in fear of attack from the non-Aryans. The non-Aryans themselves are described as living in fortified *puras* (townships) possessing great material wealth coveted by the hungry conquerors. One of the titles of Indra is *Puramdara* which may be translated as the terror of the *puras* of the non-Aryans.³ Wars were not only defensive but also offensive, waged for the sake of rich booty.⁴ The Vedic army comprised infantry as well as chariots.⁵ The equipment consisted of bows and arrows, a coat of mail, the handguard worn to protect the hand from the friction of the bowstring, a helmet, sword, spear, missiles and sling-stones.⁶ The most celebrated event of the Rig Vedic times is the Battle of the Ten Kings which led to the process of the political unification of the Aryan nation.⁷

Religion, to a large extent, reflected this preoccupation with war. The chief mode of worship was sacrifice. Sacrifices were both everyday and seasonal and comprised the offering of milk and grain, soma and animals. It was from the soma plant that the sacrificial drink was brewed and Indra is described as being very fond of it.⁸ In course of time sacrifice became so important as to develop into a very involved and elaborate ritual. The *rajasuya* and *ashvamedha* sacrifices had obvious political associations and the great animal sacrifices involved the slaughter of hundreds of animals.⁹ This trend is reflected in the *Brahmana* literature which is largely devoted to the cult of sacrifice. Gradually, however, there was growing a reaction against the cult of sacrifice and this is reflected in the *Upanishads*. It is manifest in the concept of "mental sacrifice" first hinted at in the *Aranyakas* and later elaborated in the *Upanishads*.¹⁰ Sacrifice is now not

² *Ibid.*, IV, 38, 5-6; A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 36

³ S. Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 260-61 ⁴ *Rig Veda*, X, 142, 4

⁵ See *Atharva Veda*, VII, 62, 1; also *Rig Veda*, II, 12, 8

⁶ R. K. Mookerji, *Hindu Civilization*, I, pp. 99-100

⁷ *Rig Veda*, VII, 33, 2, 5; 83, 87

⁸ *Rig Veda Samhita*, (Trans. Wilson), Fifth Ashtaka, pp. 194-5

⁹ U. N. Ghoshal, *History of Indian Political Ideas*, pp. 24-5

¹⁰ R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*, p. 8

only questioned in its efficacy but there is a definite tendency to scoff at ritualism as such.¹¹ There was also a new philosophical trend which adversely affected the cult of sacrifice. This was the new concept of rebirth as a result of karma. In the teaching of Yajnyavalkya there is no mention of man being reborn as an animal though in some of the *Upanishads* the possibility of man being reborn as an animal is clearly accepted. According to Radhakrishnan "the idea may have been derived from the aboriginal tribes. In almost all regions of the world the untutored savage thought that human souls could pass into animal bodies. The Aryan invaders, in their commerce with the original inhabitants of India, came across the notion that animals and plants possessed souls, and human souls sometimes took their dwelling in them. The holiness of life in all things, the equality of origin in the flower, the insect, the animal and the man were the fundamental ideas of the *Upanishads*, which betrayed them into an acceptance of this position. It has also great practical value. The tenderness shown to animals in the ashramas of the forests favoured the doctrine. Proud man was required to get rid of his snobbery and exclusiveness, and admit with the humility of a St. Francis that the black beetle was his brother."¹² The one consequence of this line of reasoning was not only to discourage the slaughter of animals on the sacrificial ground but also to lead to the concept of non-violence. In economic terms the cult of sacrifice was becoming wasteful and yielding diminishing returns in religious thinking. The destruction of large herds of animals, so essential to an agricultural economy, inevitably led to a strong reaction against sacrifice itself and the increasing demand by the priesthood for prizes and privileges produced its own reaction in the form of a revolt against the priesthood itself. D. D. Kosambi observes in this connection that "the greatest fruit of the *Yajnya* sacrifice was success in war; fighting was glorified for its own sake as the natural mode of life for the kshatriyas, while the Brahmana's duty and means of livelihood was the performance of vedic sacrifices. The other two castes had the task of producing the surplus which priest and warrior took away by natural right, originally for the good of the tribe, but soon for the good of the upper castes. The Vedic ritual was formulated in a pastoral age when large

¹¹ P. Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, pp. 62-3

¹² S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, pp. 251-2

herds collectively owned were the main form of property. The new society had gone over to agriculture, so that the slaughter of more and more animals at a growing number of sacrifices meant a much heavier drain upon producer and production. Not only was the number of cattle bred proportionately much less per head of population but they were now privately owned by clans or families rather than tribes, and more valuable to the agriculturist than to herdsmen. That they were taken as before without compensation meant in effect a heavy tax upon the *Vaisya* class. Apart from their having less to trade because of this tax, trade and production were both disturbed by the unceasing petty warfare. Even the most passive of the sects repudiated the use of ritual sacrifice, while the most active like Jainism and Buddhism based themselves upon ahimsa 'non-killing', as strongly opposed to war as to ritual sacrifice".¹³ The above argument though it involves a set of assumptions not supported by clear or conclusive evidence, generally indicates the probable origins of the concept of non-violence. There is no clear evidence to support Kosambi's conclusion that in the beginning the herds were collectively owned for as far as can be seen from Rig Vedic evidence the idea of private property is not only known but also firmly rooted. Secondly to characterize the Rig Vedic society, as seems to be implied, as entirely pastoral is to overstretch the existing evidence. The decline of the cult of sacrifice was as much due to intellectual causes as to socio-economic factors. The cult of sacrifice degenerated into a mechanical ritual which became intellectually progressively unsatisfactory. Already in the *Aranyakas* there is the introduction of the mystical note in speculations on the nature and function of the sacrifice and the *Upanishads* clearly expose the utter inadequacy of the cult in intellectual terms and strike out in entirely new directions. The ideas of karma and rebirth, as indicated earlier, profoundly influenced men's thinking about the universe and the different orders of beings existing in it and made sacrifice irrelevant to the moral and spiritual situation of man. Alongside of this intellectual trend develop the social and economic situations. In the social sphere the increasing importance of the priestly class was bound to lead to a reaction against it and its theories which were also economically wasteful to the classes in-

¹³ D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 157-8

volved in the production of wealth. These intellectual, social and economic causes combined to produce the movement against sacrifice with which began the development of the concept of non-violence.

But though the concept of non-violence was getting accepted on the individual spiritual level there was as yet no indication that its viability and validity could be apparent on the collective and political level. This was obviously due to the existence of continuous warfare consequent upon the expansion of the Aryans into mid-India. Since the Vedic age the ambition of the kings was to destroy their enemies and conquer their lands and this ambition was whetted by what it fed on.¹⁴ In the Epic Age the Kshatriya comes into his own. It is an age of youth, an age of the "domination of the old by the young, the weak by the strong".¹⁵ It is an age of war wherein "strength of muscles and skill in arms imply leadership in society, and youthful precocity is very much in evidence in the immaturity of the leaders, so far as age goes." It is an age of "personal bravery of vigorous young men, ambitious of fame, confident of prowess, proud and boastful".¹⁶ Long experience of war had created a certain attitude in the Kshatriya whose business was war. Says the *Mahabharata* "the man who takes to a hero's bed on the field of battle becomes the equal of the Grandsire Brahma himself. There is no end higher than this. Even this is what the great rishis have declared."¹⁷ The spirit of war was so much in the air that even the Brahmanas were affected by it. The preceptors of the young princes were generally Brahmanas and they were well versed in the use of weapons and the art of war.¹⁸ Occasionally the great epic speaks of the desirability of avoiding war but if this cannot be done then it insists that it must be fought.¹⁹ War is so institutionalized that not only is it regarded as the sole responsibility of a specific class but there is also developed a distinct code of war. Though deceit has to be countered by deceit it should be the warrior's constant endeavour to use fair means. A man on horseback should not fight another in a chariot or one wearing armour should not strike an opponent

¹⁴ *Atharva Veda*, IV, 22; VI, 38, 39, 97; VIII, 8

¹⁵ N. K. Siddhanta, *The Heroic Age of India*, p. 114 ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115

¹⁷ *Mahabharata*, Anushasana Parva, (Trans. P. C. Roy), X, p. 59

¹⁸ See Beni Prasad, *Theory of Government in Ancient India*, p. 24

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2

unprotected by mail. The disabled must not be struck and unfair blows must not be delivered; a wounded fighter when taken captive must be given medical aid and restored to liberty. A warrior must not strike another who is sleeping, thirsty, fatigued or eating and the lives of campfollowers must be spared. A maiden taken captive may be asked to marry the victor after a year and on her refusal must be restored to her own people. The cattle captured must be distributed among the Brahmanas. One should not fight with another inferior in social status. These are the rules of a *dharmayuddha*,²⁰ righteous war, and it is reasonable to assume that, by and large, they were followed. In fact when the Hindus fought against the Muslims their adherence to the rules of war, as they understood them, created conditions of weakness for them since the Muslims were not bound to observe these rules. The Epic Age, thus, being an age of war had little occasion to develop theories of non-violence though it is in the *Mahabharata* that the famous saying that non-violence is the highest virtue occurs.²¹

III

In the fifth century B.C. arose the great ascetical movements foremost among which were Buddhism and Jainism. Their general stand involved a repudiation of Vedic authority including that of the cult of sacrifice. The Brahmanadhammika Sutta of the *Suttanipata* well expresses this attitude and introduces humanistic considerations against the sacrificial slaughter of animals.²² The Kandaraka Sutta of the *Majjhima Nikaya* describes a scene of sacrifice thus: "Take the case of an individual who becomes an anointed king of Noble race, or a brahmin magnate. East of the town, he orders the building of a new sacrificial hall, into which, after first cutting off his hair and beard and donning the rough pelt of a black antelope, he goes with his queen-consort and his brahmin chaplain, with his body anointed with ghee and oil, and scratching his itching back with an antler. His bed is grass and leaves strewn on the bare ground. For the whole party, there is only one solitary cow, with a calf by her side, which must be

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63

²¹ *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, 262, 5-6; *Ibid.*, Anushasana Parva (Roy's Trans.) IX, p. 3; also p. 36 ²² *Sutta Nipata*, pp. 50-54

coloured precisely like its mother, and on this solitary cow's milk the king has the first call, the queen-consort takes the second turn, the brahmin the third, the fourth makes the fire-oblation, while the calf has to get along on what is left. Says the king: 'Let there be slain for the sacrifice so many bulls, so many steers, heifers, goats and rams. Let there be felled so many trees for sacrificial posts. Let so much *kusa* grass be cut to stre~~w~~ round the sacrificial spot.' And all persons known as slaves, messengers and servants, harried by stripes and fear, then set about the preparations with tearful faces and voices of lamentation. Such a man is said to torment himself and others, and to be given to tormenting both" which is not only spiritually barren of results but also dangerous.²³

But the Buddhist concept of non-violence was not just a negative reaction to the cult of violence as manifested in the ritual of sacrifice.²⁴ Buddha emphasized the importance of the qualities of non-hatred (*avera*) and compassion (*karuna*) which became the philosophical foundations of the concept of non-violence. 'Not by hatred' declares the *Dhammapada* 'is hatred stilled but by non hatred is hatred stilled that is the ancient law'.²⁵ 'All fear violence' it goes on to say 'all are afraid of death, putting oneself in the position of others one should not kill or harm'.²⁶ To live without hatred among those who are filled with hate is a difficult but spiritually necessary discipline.²⁷ The wise man is he who is without hatred, the mark of nobility is non-violence towards all. And finally without non violence Nirvana is impossible.²⁸ Of the ten commandments laid down by the Buddha for his disciples the first says 'I shall abstain from causing the death of living beings'. Commenting on this Buddhaghosa says "taking life means to murder anything that lives. It refers to the striking and killing of living beings. Anything that lives"—ordinary people speak here of a 'living being', but more philosophically we speak of anything that has the life-force. 'Taking life' is then the will to kill anything that one perceives as having life, to act as to terminate the life-force in it, in so far as the will finds expression in bodily action or in speech".²⁹ The Jambas,

²³ *Majjhima Nikaya* I p 343 Chalmers *Further Dialogues of the Buddha* I p 249 ²⁴ *Dhammapada* 5 *Ibid* 129 ²⁵ *Ibid* 197

²⁷ *Ibid* 258 261 270 ²⁸ *Ibid* 225

²⁹ See F. Conze *Buddhist Scriptures* p 70

likewise, insist on the primacy of non-violence and make it a corner-stone of their ethics.³⁰ But their interpretation of this doctrine is more rigorous than that of the Buddhists. As Radhakrishnan observes: "The chief feature of Jainism is ahimsa, or respect for abstinence from everything that has life. The scrupulous enforcement of this rule has led to many practices which come in for cheap sneering at the hands of unsympathetic students. Lest any life be destroyed, some Jains sweep the ground as they go, walk veiled for fear of inhaling a living organism, strain water and reject even honey!"³¹

With Buddhism and Jainism, then, the concept of non-violence comes into its own. But it must be understood that non-violence was understood more as an ethical than a social concept in that it referred primarily to individual rather than collective action. The Buddha generally expressed himself against strife and violence and prohibited his disciples (monks and nuns) to attend army reviews. But precisely at the time when he lived and preached Magadha was becoming an imperial power and the foot-prints of this imperialism were seen on many battlefields. He had excellent relations with kings like Bimbisara, his parricidal son Ajatashatru and Pasendi Kosala. He does not seem to have advised them to disband their armies and practise non-violence. This was natural because the Buddhists made a clear distinction between religious affairs and affairs of the state and accepted the possibility and reality of different norms for the two. In their political theory they lay a greater emphasis on dharma than on danda and the Universal Monarch of their conception conquers the world without resort to force and rules in a non-violent way.³² This implies that the Buddhists had begun to think seriously of the political implications of the concept of non-violence and had put forward a theory of kingship based on this concept of non-violence.

But the prevailing intellectual temper being faced with the reality of war as a means of political and social unification was not conducive to a wide-spread application of the concept of non-violence to practical politics. That temper finally saw its culmination in the ideas of the *Arthashastra* and the establishment of the Maurya empire by Chandragupta. The basis of the state, according to Kautilya is danda than which there could be no better

³⁰ Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 325-6 ³¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 327

³² B. G. Gokhale, "Dhammiko Dhammaraja", *Indica*, pp. 161-5

instrument for bringing people under control.³³ He lays down eight constituents of the state and these are, (a) king, (b) minister, (c) country, (d) fort, (e) treasury, (f) army, (g) friend and (h) enemy of which fort, army, friend and enemy are directly connected with war. An ideal king, he says, is possessed of valour, powerful, of resolute mind, quick in his decisions and actions and intelligent enough to take advantage of the weaknesses of his enemies for the enlargement of his kingdom.³⁴ There are three kinds of strength for a king and one of them comprises the treasury and the army which are the basis of sovereignty.³⁵ Kautilya discusses with great analytical skill the role of war as a form of state policy and says: "Whoever is inferior to another shall make peace with him; whoever is superior in power shall wage war; whoever thinks, 'No enemy can hurt me, nor am I strong enough to destroy my enemy', shall observe neutrality; whoever is possessed of necessary means shall march against his enemy; whoever is devoid of necessary strength to defend himself shall seek the protection of another; whoever thinks that help is necessary to work out an end shall make peace with one and wage war with another. Such is the aspect of the six forms of policy."³⁶ Kautilya, thus, is as far away from the concept of non-violence as was possible for a statesman of his times though in another place, in deference to the temper of non-violence he does state that "when the advantages derivable from peace and war are of equal character, one should prefer peace; for disadvantages, such as the loss of power and wealth, sojourning and sin, are ever attending upon war."³⁷ But expansion being one of the objectives of the state, acquisition through peace could be more of an exception than a rule. Hence he, very realistically, goes on to discuss the means of waging successful war and advocates treachery and violence, bribery and corruption as means of subverting the subjects of the king's enemies.

It was a dynastic revolution that enthroned Chandragupta Maurya and he must have waged many successful wars to enlarge his possession into an empire. We definitely know of one war, that against Seleucos Nicator (305 B.C.) as a result of which Chandragupta received four satrapies. The Mauryas maintained a formidable army and exercised a tight control over their posses-

³³ Shamasastri, *Arthashastra*, p. 8

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 287

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 293

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 296

sions. When in the eighth year of his reign the people of Kalinga revolted Asoka ruthlessly crushed the rebellion. That war became a turning point in Asoka's career. He tells the story of this dramatic event in the following words: "When king Devanampiya Piyadasi had been anointed eight years, (the country of) the Kalingas was conquered by (him). One hundred and fifty thousand in number were those who were deported then, one hundred thousand in number were those who were slain there, and many times as many those who died. After that, now that (the country of) the Kalingas had been taken, Devanampiya (is devoted) to a zealous study of morality, to the love of morality, and to the instruction (of people) in morality. This is the repentance of Devanampiya on account of his conquest of (the country of) the Kalingas."³⁸ This is perhaps the most noteworthy event in the history of war and non-violence not only in India but perhaps in the whole world. Never before, nor ever afterwards, was there a king who felt regret for doing something which is always regarded as a legitimate business of kings. From 261 B.C. onwards Asoka followed the policy of non-violence as his official policy and the sword that was sheathed at the conclusion of the Kalinga war was never unsheathed again. Increasingly he devoted himself to the propagation of morality and Buddhism and undertook a large number of public works for the welfare of his subjects. But it is significant to notice here that the policy of non-violence applied to external relations and not necessarily to internal matters. He did not abolish the death penalty but only gave a few concessions to those condemned to death; nor is it known that he disbanded his army. But that does not detract from his noble achievements. For the first time he had the courage to renounce war as a form of state policy and declare non-violence as the basis of international relations. The substitution of *shastravijaya* (conquest through war) by *dharmavijaya* (conquest through morality) marks a distinct milestone in the history of ideas in India and the world. Even in the matter of internal administration Asoka introduced many measures actuated by his devotion to the concept of non-violence. He gave up the royal hunt and prohibited the slaughter of many birds and animals.³⁹ He also stopped the *samajas* (festive gatherings) at which liquor was consumed and large quantities of

³⁸ E. Hultzsch, *C.I.I., Inscriptions of Asoka*, p. 68

³⁹ Rock Edict VIII; Pillar Edict V

meat consumed and in his own kitchen he reduced the slaughter of animals to three.⁴⁰ He stopped animal sacrifices⁴¹ and appointed a special class of officers—morality officers—to enforce his moral regulations.⁴²

IV

But soon a reaction set in. Within half a century of Asoka's death his empire was overthrown by the Shungas and the founder of the dynasty, Pushyamitra, performed two horse sacrifices in the capital, Pataliputra. The concept of non-violence, however, was by now widely accepted and firmly rooted among the people the evidence for which comes from the sumptuary regulations for Brahmanas as indicated by the *Dharmashastras*. The Brahmanas were not supposed to eat meat or drink liquor and gradually this was taken as the norm of dietary excellence by the other classes. But the *Dharmashastras* are not firmly committed to the concept of non-violence in collective life though on the individual level they regard it as highly desirable. Echoing the *Mahabharata* Manu advises that an appeal to arms should be avoided as far as possible.⁴³ On the other hand he repeats the ideas of Kautilya when he conceded to the king the right to declare war when he feels that his army is strong and his kingdom prosperous, and the reverse is the case with his opponents.⁴⁴ In the matter of war and foreign policy Manu advocates no ethical principles but is content to rest his whole philosophy on the grounds of expediency.⁴⁵ He goes even further and gives the right of bearing arms to Brahmanas and Vaishyas in circumstances when they feel that their religion and culture are threatened with extinction.⁴⁶ This is in accordance with the thought of the *Mahabharata* which allows the Brahmanas to bear arms to defend themselves, to punish robbers, to compel others to do their duties and in times of distress.⁴⁷ Manu even forgets the rules of righteous war when he says "When he has shut up his foe (in a town), let him sit encamped, harass his kingdom, and continually spoil

⁴⁰ Rock Edict I ⁴¹ Rock Edict IV ⁴² Pillar Edict VII

⁴³ *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 198 ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 171

⁴⁵ Beni Prasad, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90 ⁴⁶ See Chapter Seven; Note 57

⁴⁷ *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, LXXVIII, 21-4; 2-11

his grass, food, fuel, and water.”⁴⁸ This is quite different from the usage in Mauryan India as noticed by Megasthenes. He states that “among other nations it is usual, in the contests of war, to ravage the soil, and thus to reduce it to an uncultivated waste, among the Indians, on the contrary, by whom husbandmen are regarded as the class that is sacred and inviolable, the tillers of the soil, even when battle is raging in their neighbourhood, are undisturbed by any sense of danger, for the combatants on either side in waging the conflict make carnage of each other, but allow those engaged in husbandry to remain quite unmolested. Besides, they neither ravage an enemy’s land with fire nor cut down its trees.”⁴⁹ From Manu’s injunction, it appears, he advocates conditions of total war indicating the increasing bitterness of war and the growing economic crisis reflected therein.

Further Manu advises the king to wage successful war in the following words: “Likewise let him destroy the tanks, ramparts, and ditches, and let him assail the (foe unawares) and alarm him at night.”⁵⁰ This is in complete violation of the concept of *dharmayuddha*. In other matters he closely follows Kautilya: “Let him instigate to rebellion those who are open to such instigations, let him be informed of his (foe’s) doings, and, when fate is propitious, let him fight without fear, trying to conquer. He should (however) try to conquer his foes by conciliation, by (well applied) gifts, and by creating dissensions, used either separately or conjointly, never by fighting (if it can be avoided). For when two (princes) fight, victory and defeat in the battle are, as experience teaches, uncertain; let him therefore avoid an engagement. (But) if even those three before-mentioned expedients fail, then, let him, duly exerting himself, fight in such a manner that he may completely conquer his enemies.”⁵¹ In this, what is apparent is that Manu is chary of war not on any ethical grounds but because of the uncertainties of outcome. For him, therefore, there is no question of any commitment to the concept of non-violence in collective action. On the individual level he no doubt recommends virtues like forbearance and non-injury but these observations are of a general character and do not reveal any consistent

⁴⁸ *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 195

⁴⁹ Majumdar and Pusalkar, *Age of Imperial Unity*, p. 68

⁵⁰ *Manavadharmashastra*, VII, 196

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 197-200

philosophy of non-violence.⁵²

The growing vegetarianism stemmed from causes quite different. As early as the Brahmana period the ideas of ahimsa in sumptuary matters were becoming crystallized. In the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, for instance, it is stated that he who eats beef is born again on the earth as a man of evil fame and the *Kaushitaki Brahmana* has warnings of retribution for eaters of meat.⁵³ We have referred earlier to Manu's injunctions against meat-eating on the part of the Brahmanas and this practice became increasingly important for other castes also, as is observed by Fa Hian when he says that throughout Madhyadesha the people kill no living being.⁵⁴ That such a statement need not be taken too literally is clear from the observations of Hiuen Tsiang who visited India in the 7th century A.D. He says that the people do not eat onions and garlic much and "if any one uses them for food, they are expelled beyond the walls of the town." The most usual food is milk, butter, cream, soft sugar, sugar-candy, the oil of the mustard-seed, and all sorts of cakes made of corn are used as food. Fish, mutton, gazelle, and deer they eat generally fresh, sometimes salted they are forbidden to eat the flesh of the ox, the ass, the elephant, the horse, the pig, the dog, the fox, the wolf, the lion, the monkey, and all the hairy kind. Those who eat them are despised and scorned, and are universally reprobated; they live outside the walls, and are seldom seen among men."⁵⁵ The reasons for this growing vegetarianism must be sought rather in economic factors like the relative paucity of large pasture lands making it difficult to raise large herds of cattle for food purposes as also the influence of religious ideas coming from Vaishnavism and Jainism. That this vegetarianism did not reflect a commitment to the concept of non-violence, except in the case of the Jainas, is a reasonable conclusion.

On theoretical grounds the later writers like Shukra more or less repeat the ideas of the *Mahabharata*, *Arthshastra* and the *Dharmashastras*. There is the glorification of war in the case of the Kshattriya for whom it is a disgrace to die in bed.⁵⁶ There is also the acceptance of the concept of open and treacherous

⁵² *Ibid.*, V, 107

⁵³ *Shatapatha Brahmana*, III, 1-21; *Kaushitaki Brahmana*, XII, 3

⁵⁴ S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, XXXVIII

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 88-9 ⁵⁶ *Shukranitisara*, IV, 7, 305

wars.⁵⁷ The normal causes of war in India may be described as six: "(a) the desire to attain imperial status, (b) the necessity of self-preservation, (c) the acquisition of more territories or tributes, (d) the restoration of the balance of power, (e) the retaliation for raids and (f) the rescue of oppressed populations."⁵⁸ The existence of many states in the country made warfare inevitable and continuous warfare created a class of professional warriors who found employment only in war. Under the circumstances, therefore, it would have been surprising if the concept of renunciation of war and non-violence, as a matter of state policy, had been found acceptable and realistic.

V

The historical evidence from inscriptions and accounts of foreign travellers also point to the same conclusion. It is not without significance that the Allahabad Pillar should have two inscriptions separated not only by a gap of some 600 years but also by a striking difference in their contents. The inscription of Asoka breathes a temper of peace; that of Samudra Gupta exults in his war-like achievements. In a sense the two inscriptions symbolize the two strands in Indian thinking of acceptance of war as a reality of life and an insistence on non-violence as the ultimate ideal. Samudra Gupta's inscription describes how the monarch humbled numerous kings of the north and the south and how his most charming body was covered over with scars of wounds received in battle. His own coins show his war-like as well as cultural personality. Three of the coin-types reflect his militarism. On one he is shown with a bow on the left and an arrow on the right with the legend "having conquered the earth, the invincible one wins heaven by good deeds". In another, the king is shown holding a battle-axe with the legend "wielding the axe of Kritanta (the god of death), the unconquered conqueror of unconquered kings is victorious". In the third type he is shown trampling upon a tiger which he has shot with the legend which compares his valour to that of a tiger.⁵⁹ Here, then, is the embodiment of

⁵⁷ *Kamandakanitisara*, See Majumdar and Pusalkar, *The Classical Age*, p. 341

⁵⁸ A. S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, p. 219

⁵⁹ Majumdar and Altekar, *The Vakataka-Gupta Age, A New History of the Indian People*, VI, pp. 156-7

valour and energy (*virya*), the most eloquent symbol of Indian militarism inspired by an ideal of a universal empire. Similarly in the case of his son and successor Chandra Gupta we see the same glorification of his warlike activities. On one of his coin-types the king is shown standing with a sword in hand and on another he rides a fully caprisoned horse holding a bow and a sword. On a third type he is shown slaying a lion.⁶⁰ The same spirit is conveyed by the coins and inscriptions of Kumara Gupta and Skanda Gupta indicating thereby that this represented the general feeling of the Golden Age the empire of which was based on extensive warfare and conquests.

In the period that followed the picture is not different. It is reasonable to believe that it was not until the closing part of his reign that Harsha (606-647) was formally converted to Buddhism. Of Harsha, Hiuen Tsiang says that he had an army of "5000 elephants, a body of 2000 cavalry, and 50,000 foot-soldiers. He went from east to west subduing all who were not obedient; the elephants were not unharnessed nor the soldiers unbelted (unhelmeted). After six years he had subdued the Five Indies. Having thus enlarged his territory, he increased his forces; he had 60,000 war elephants and 100,000 cavalry. After thirty years his arms reposed, and he governed everywhere in peace. He then practised to the utmost the rules of temperance, and sought to plant the tree of religious merit to such an extent that he forgot to sleep or to eat. He forbade the slaughter of any living thing or flesh as food throughout the Five Indies on pain of death without pardon."⁶¹

Of Harsha's adversary Pulakeshin II and his people Hiuen Tsiang has the following to say: "The climate is hot; the disposition of the people is honest and simple; they are tall of stature, and of a stern, vindictive character. To their benefactors they are grateful; to their enemies relentless. If they are insulted, they will risk their life to avenge themselves. If they are asked to help one in distress, they will forget themselves in their haste to render assistance. If they are going to seek revenge, they first give their enemy warning; then, each being armed, they attack each other with lances (spears). When one turns to flee, the other pursues him, but they do not kill a man down (a person who submits). If a general loses a battle, they do not inflict

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* ⁶¹ Beal, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 213-14

punishment, but present him with a woman's clothes, and so he is driven to seek death for himself. The country provides for a band of champions to the number of several hundred. Each time they are about to engage in conflict they intoxicate themselves with wine, and then one man with lance in hand will meet ten thousand and challenge them in fight. If one of these champions meets a man and kills him, the laws of the country do not punish him. Every time they go forth they beat drums before them. Moreover, they inebriate many hundred heads of elephants, and, taking them out to fight, they themselves first drink their wine, and then rushing forward in mass, they trample everything down, so that no enemy can stand before them. The king, in consequence of his possessing these men and elephants, treats his neighbours with contempt. He is of the Kshatriya caste, and his name is Pulakeshi. His plan and undertakings are widespread, and his beneficent actions are felt over a great distance. His subjects obey him with perfect submission."⁶²

The rulers of the period during the 8-11th centuries A.D. waged incessant war and fortunes changed with almost every battle. The Rashtrakutas, Gurjara-Pratihara, Cholas, Chandellas and a host of others ranged up and down the country with their large armies in pursuit of imperial glory almost in the spirit of Kautilyan polity. When the Islamic invasion began the Hindu kingdoms were struggling for their very survival and in the atmosphere of crisis when the very honour of their womenfolk and the sanctity of their religion were threatened by ruthless invaders the Hindu rulers of the time could have been scarcely human if they had entertained any ideas of non-violence. War was no longer a matter of an occasional foray or raid into one or other part of the country in fulfilment of *digvijaya* ("world" conquest) but a conflict of attrition. The conflict is highlighted by the heroism of the Rajputs who fought desperately and honourably for their hearths and homes and their honour, and heroes like Prithviraj Chauhan etched their names in the chronicle of Indian history in letters burnished with blood. Warfare was becoming more and more ferocious and the old rules of war were either deliberately put aside or conveniently forgotten. Of the wars fought between the Vijayanagara kings and their Muslim neighbours T. V. Mahalingam observes "Of course the old ideas about righteous warfare

⁶² *Ibid.*, II, p. 256

were remembered; but how far the theories were translated into actual practice is a question. Krishnadevaraya, however, not only laid down certain principles that must guide the kings in their war policy, but also acted upto them in certain respects. In the war of 1366 waged between the Hindus and the Muhammadans, the Vijayanagar king 'with a rancorous cruelty put men, women and children to the sword' and Muhammad Shah, the Bahamani Sultan committed the same excesses and did not spare even children at the breast. In 1417 'the Hindus made a general massacre of the Mussalmans, erected a platform with their heads on the field of battle, and pursuing the king into his own country laid it waste with fire and sword.' Sultan Ahmad took vengeance on the Hindu king, invaded the Vijayanagar territory, massacred the people without mercy, and 'whenever the number of slain amounted to twenty thousand, he halted three days, and made a festival in celebration of the bloody event.' Rama Raj left no cruelty unpractised in the Muhammadan territories. He destroyed their mosques, insulted the honour of Mussalman women, 'and committed the most outrageous devastations, burning and razing the buildings, putting up their horses in the mosques and performing their abominable worship in the holy places'. . . it must be noted that the high ideals found in the Sastric texts did not guide the actual policy of either the Vijayanagar kings or their Muhammadan neighbours.⁶³

These wars led to a coarsening of the fabric of civilization for both Hindus as well as Muslims. Even an enlightened ruler like Akbar could fly into a murderous frenzy and order the massacre of thousands of people after his victorious assault on the fortress of Chitor.⁶⁴ But that was not his normal nature for in a reflective moment he could aspire to turn to vegetarianism but desist from doing so only out of consideration for his nobles who would suffer hardships out of their imitation of the emperor's habit!⁶⁵ But this was also the period of religious revival and the saint poets sang of gentleness, amity and non-violence.⁶⁶ Even in that warlike age, then, the concept of non-violence was not completely sub-

⁶³ T. V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life Under Vijayanagar*, pp. 166-7

⁶⁴ See B. G. Gokhale, *The Making of the Indian Nation*, pp. 69-70

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72

⁶⁶ Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, pp. 150ff; 226ff

merged in the rivers of blood let loose by long and predatory warfare practically all over the sub-continent.

The Maratha renaissance and the rise of the Sikh states in the 17th and 18th centuries were results of independence secured after prolonged war against the Mughal empire. In collective life war was recognized as the legitimate, and perhaps the only, way of successful survival. On the individual level, among the religious people especially, the virtue of non-violence was duly recognized and held in high esteem. But what was individually possible was not always collectively practicable and this recognition led to the two parallel trends wherein the concept of non-violence and war as an institution could co-exist in the thinking of the people. Throughout the seventh century India was plunged into wars which continued into the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Non-violence as a concept was very much alive in the folk-mind and practised widely in individual instances. But it did not secure a place on the level of collective action until the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. In the early phases of Indian Nationalism there was an insistence on constitutionalism which, as a concept, is quite different from non-violence. The terroristic movement was as much an expression of this nascent Indian nationalism as was constitutionalism. The conflict between constitutionalism and extra-constitutional methods was effectively resolved with the introduction of the concept of non-violent non-co-operation by Mahatma Gandhi in the twenties of the present century.

The credit for putting the concept of non-violence on the map of collective action, then, must go to Mahatma Gandhi. For him it was much more than an instrument of political action; it was a distinct way of life. He says "The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—to the strength of the spirit." He was opposed to war and held that the "science of war leads one to dictatorship pure and simple. Science of non-violence alone can lead one to pure democracy." Non-violence, according to him, can be practised at all levels, individual as well as collective. Non-violence is not just a negative quality but a

positive force of love and patience, born of the conviction that human beings can be persuaded and morally converted so as to make them act in the ways of truth and righteousness.⁶⁷ For him non-violence was synonymous with truth and is the heart of all religions. It is thus an eternal, all-pervasive principle and is applicable to all situations in life and the world.⁶⁸ He regards non-violence as a sign of strength and not an indication of weakness but if there is a choice between cowardice and violence he would advise violence.⁶⁹ Non-violence, then, in Gandhi's philosophy is not just the means to an end but the end in itself.

That this philosophy was largely influential in the working out of the Indian national movement after its leadership passed into Gandhi's hands cannot be denied. The various campaigns launched by him were experiments in the technique of non-violence though a few of them were marred by small violent outbreaks. But in all Indian history, perhaps in the history of the world, non-violence was tried out on such a collective scale for the first time and succeeded well. This success was as much due to the skilful leadership of Gandhi and his lieutenants as due to the existence of the concept of non-violence on the individual level in Indian thinking through the ages which made it easy for Gandhi to transform it from an individual to a collective basis. It is also arguable that it succeeded because on the opposite side there was a political system which was moored securely to the concept of law and justice; that in another circumstance characterized by totalitarian violence, non-violence may have failed to yield the desired results. And it may also be pointed out for the record that not all of Gandhiji's followers had unreservedly accepted his philosophy of non-violence. Jawaharlal Nehru was under Gandhiji's influence as perhaps no other leader was, yet he expressed doubts about the concept of non-violence as propounded by Gandhiji from time to time.⁷⁰ The only people who unreservedly accepted non-violence as a philosophy and way of life were the Sarvodayins foremost among whom is Vinoba Bhave, the Bhoodan leader.

⁶⁷ N. K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, Chap. IX, pp. 142ff

⁶⁸ G. N. Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, pp.

58-61

⁶⁹ *Harlan*, October 21, 1930

⁷⁰ M. Brecher, *Nehru, A Political Biography*, pp. 75, 89, 123, 129

After the emergence of independence there was an increasing divergence between Gandhi's ideas and the actions of the Government of India. The situation was explosive and the Government, responsible as it was for law and order within the country, made use of force to put down undesirable activities. But the Government's actions could be understood for many of the agitations and demonstrations were prone to turn violent and quite a few of them did so. In the matter of expenditure on defence forces the national budget did not show any marked change and the situation created by the Chinese aggression on the northern frontier in 1959 naturally led to more spending on the armed forces to enable them to meet the Chinese threat to the integrity of the territories of the Indian Union. Though the Government of India has generally opposed military pacts and arms-races the logic of the circumstances confronting them on their own frontiers has brought home an awareness that far from being completely outlawed war is still a very real institution in most of the areas of the world. In the context of its history, then, the concept of non-violence has been able to retain its viability and validity on the individual level and only under exceptional circumstances has succeeded on the collective level as during the experience of the Indian nationalist movement under Gandhi's leadership. At present it is difficult to say that the concept has secured deep roots in the Indian mind in the context of collective action.

VI

Our survey of the history of the twin concepts of war and non-violence has revealed that the two ideas have been existing side by side all through the ages. It was only at two points in the long history of the country that the concept of non-violence was tried out on the collective levels. The first was during the time of Asoka (272-232 B.C.) and under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi (A.D. 1920-1942). In the first instance it was tried out on the governmental level in the context of waging wars against external enemies. As pointed out earlier Asoka did not disband his armies nor did he abolish the death penalty though he prohibited animal sacrifices and issued injunctions against the killing of several birds and animals. He gave up the royal hunt and tried to inculcate his ideas of morality among his subjects. Non-

violence was one of the ideas among the corpus of his concepts. The second instance was the experiment in non-violent non-cooperation against a foreign power. That experiment was successful as it was also helped by many other factors among which must be mentioned the economic costs of an empire held under subjection by force by an exhausted Britain and the political vision displayed by the then British leadership in comprehending the undesirable implication of those costs and their political results.

The history of the concept of war reveals a consistent pattern of comprehension and practice. War is regarded, by and large, as undesirable though it is also recognized that in many circumstances it is inevitable. Out of this realization arose the concept of dharmayuddha or righteous war. The war, which forms the core of the *Mahabharata* story, is a prominent instance of such a war. Arjuna surveys in the opposing ranks his own kinsmen and speaks of turning away from battle. Krishna advises him to do his duty by pointing out that war was not of his asking and that as a Kshatriya it is his duty to fight. Moreover, he is fighting on the side of right and justice and in such a war no sin is involved.⁷¹ It has been argued that the war-story in the *Bhagavad-gita* is metaphorical and that the essential message of the book is of non-violence.⁷² But the *Gita* must be understood as a text that was completed sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 and the social and economic mores of the time had nothing in them to indicate that the concept of non-violence on the collective level had found any deep root. It is more reasonable to argue that the situation of war as described in the *Gita* is a real one though it is open to metaphorical interpretations. Even a cursory consideration of the iconography of the Krishna image where he is shown as holding the discus would lead one to conclude that Krishna is not essentially an apostle of non-violence much as Gandhi would have us believe. It was this ideal of the dharmayuddha, righteous war, that inspired generations of Indian kings in the ancient period. Besides the concept of dharmayuddha there was also the concept of asuravijaya (war for the sake of conquest and annexations) prevalent in ancient India as is shown by the conduct of Samudra Gupta in his treatment of his northern Indian

⁷¹ *Bhagavadgita*, I, verses 29-47; II, 1-12; 18, 31-7

⁷² M. Desai, *Gospel of Selfless Action or the Gita according to Gandhi*, pp. 12-13

foes. Kautilya frankly recognizes that it is a legitimate business of the king to annex neighbouring territories. The wars waged by the Guptas, the Vardhanas, the Rashtrakutas, Cholas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, Palas and many other ancient Indian dynasties were for the sake of extension of their territorial possessions, in other words, annexations. On the available evidence the only conclusion that emerges is that war was regarded as an inevitable, and in some circumstances, a necessary condition of the life of the state. Wars may be fought for survival, for annexations, for universal sovereignty, for ensuring the continuance of religion and culture.

In the Muslim concept of Jihad war is glorified as an instrument of faith. To wage Jihad was the holy duty of the Islamic state and every Muslim was called upon to regard military service in the cause of Jihad as an obligatory duty.⁷³ The object of the Muslim state was to convert the Dar-ul-harb (Land of Unbelievers) into Dar-ul-Islam (realm of the True Believers) and as such, at least theoretically, the true believer could not sheath his sword until every idolator was either made to embrace the true faith or killed for his perverse refusal to see the Light. War, thus, was a necessary condition of the Islamic state and in the context of such conditions there could not even be a theoretical acceptance of the concept of non-violence on the individual, and much less on the collective level.

The concept of non-violence, then, began as a protest against the wanton destruction of animal life involved in the cult of the Vedic sacrifices. Under the impact of Buddhistic and Jainistic thought it was enlarged to embrace the whole of individual life wherein it included the attribute of compassion towards all living beings. But even during the times of Gautama, the Buddha, and Mahavira, the Jina, the concept failed to include collective national or group action and even in the case of Asoka it had relevance only in the case of waging wars against external foes. The Asokan government, as pointed out earlier, was not completely free of violence as Asoka neither disbanded his armies nor abolished the death penalty. After Asoka scarcely any Indian king tried out the concept of non-violence as a matter of state policy. The dominant concept then was that of war based as it was on the hard reality of economic and social considerations. The cult of sacrifice, though revived by the Gupta and other kings, could not assume

⁷³ M. Hamidullah, *The Muslim Conduct of State*, pp. 162-3

the economically disastrous proportions as it did at the end of the Vedic period and hence there was no practical need for the concept of non-violence in the age which saw the decline of both Vedic religion and Buddhism in India. Historically speaking, the concept of non-violence was able to decrease and eventually abolish the institution of Vedic sacrifices and to influence individual conduct but was not sufficiently viable to be adopted on the collective level. The institution of war, on the other hand, derived its vitality, viability and validity from the existing circumstances characterized by economic and social conflicts. These conflicts persisted through the ages and were aggravated by the rise of the national states, first in Europe and then in Asia. The rise of the national states in Europe sparked imperial conflicts all over the world and led to the extension of the imperial system into India and Asia. As a reaction to this rose the force of nationalism in these countries and nationalism in conflict with imperialism resulted in the polarization of forces which, only in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, were committed to non-violence both as a concept and as a way of life.

In conclusion it may be pointed out that the Indian temper, if there be any such entity at all, has not been able to accept unreservedly non-violence on the collective level; on the other hand, by and large, it has seldom swerved from commitment to non-violence on the individual and in-group relations.

CHAPTER NINE,
UTTAMAPURUṢHA

Man Perfected

The great poet Rabindranath Tagore once stated: "Man's history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realization of his immortal self—his soul. Through the rise and fall of empires; through the building up of gigantic piles of wealth and the ruthless scattering of them upon the dust; through the creation of vast bodies of symbols that give shape to his dreams and aspirations and the casting of them away like the playthings of an outworn infancy; through his forging of magic keys with which to unlock the mysteries of creation and through his throwing away of this labour of ages to go back to his workshop and work up afresh some new forms; yes, through it all man is marching from epoch to epoch towards the fullest realization of his soul—the soul which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds; the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution."¹ In the preceding chapters we attempted to examine Indian ideas on some of the activities of man referred to by Tagore, ideas on society, economy, this world and the next, pleasure and its consequences and authority and freedom. We will now survey the Indian ideas on the eternal quest of man, the quest for perfection.

Every culture has its own ideas on what constitutes perfection. These ideas are conditioned as much by the environment and the historical experience of man in it as by his spiritual awareness of the need for perfection. From very early times Indian culture has had "philosophic wisdom" as its main drive.² Radha Kamal Mukerjee explains the fundamental norms and postulates of Indian culture as "a sense of the transience of life, the all-pervasiveness of her moral law of karma and transmigration, the belief in an organic or spiritual hierarchy of society, the sacredness of family

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Sadhana*, pp. 33-4

² P. A. Schilpp, (Ed), *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p. 11

life and obligations, the ideal of human brotherhood and compassion to fellow-creatures, and the aesthetic attitude towards life, with its emotions and sentiments (rasas) treated abstractly, and hence concentratedly. Such are the social universals of an essentially metaphysical and humanist civilization—the broad fundamental postulates of its unity and development that were recurrently underlined in epochs of empire-building and renaissance, and that kept alive the resilience of the people in periods of subjection and misery."³ The four basic values recognized by Indian culture through the ages are of dharma, artha, kama and mokṣa and the integration and harmonization of the diverse aspects of life through their instrumentality is the main theme of Indian speculation on the nature and content of culture. We have already examined the ideas on the first three and now we will turn to an analysis of ideas on Mokṣa as bearing the concept of the Perfect Man.

II

The ideal of the Man Perfected has both social and metaphysical aspects. In the social sense the Perfect Man is the most highly cultured man. Vedic literature uses a few terms to convey this idea of culture when it uses concepts like *sabhya* and *śiṣṭha*. Technically *sabhya* means one who is eligible for membership of the sabha or the tribal assembly. It also implies that such a man is mature enough for his duties. It is implied that he is sufficiently interested in public affairs of the tribe and has thought intelligently enough about them to give his considered judgement on matters of public import. He is assumed to be conversant with the religious, social and economic ideas and mores of the tribe and is, as such, a well-adjusted man. The dominant ideas in such a concept were those of experience, comprehension, maturity and ability to take a detached view of things in a manner enabling him to offer reasonable, timely and prudent advice to the ruling authority whenever necessary or called for.⁴ In the *Atharva Veda* the term *śiṣṭha* is used to convey the sense of training, order, instruction, discipline and self-restraint.⁵ Later the term was also

³ Radha Kamal Mukerjee, *The Culture and Art of India*, p. 18

⁴ See *Rig Veda*, II, 6, 10; VII, 56, 12

⁵ *Atharva Veda*, XI, 1, 15; XII, 3, 27

used to imply the presence of education and cultivation of the ideas and values of the group. And when the texts used the term *shishthachara* they mean the recognized exemplary behaviour of learned and virtuous men. The other terms used are *vinaya*, discipline and *nagaraka*, the ideal citizen. The normal constituents of culture, so understood in ancient India, then, were learning and wisdom, experience and ability and a desire to serve the community whenever called upon to do so.

But this culture can only be of a preliminary kind, a sort of a preparatory stage for the realization of the higher values of life. The cultured man is a well-integrated and adjusted individual but he is not necessarily the Perfect Man. For perfection demands something more than mere integration with life and the group; nothing less than transcendence can be the basis of perfection. The earliest way of this process of transcendence is indicated in a set of rituals and a corpus of qualities. The most significant concept developed in the *Rig Veda* is that of *rita*, which apart from being the cosmic law, is essentially a moral norm. It is truth, order and a host of other things.⁶ A constant awareness of the gods, prayers to them and performance of ritual in their honour, kindness, hospitality, love of man and detachment from the world of possessions comprise aspects of the way of transcendence in the early Vedic literature.⁷ The Perfect Man, after death, abides with the gods in their heavens or with the Fathers in their world.

Through the *Vedas* and the *Brahmanas* the ideal of the Perfect Man is essentially that of a being fully involved in prayers and action pleasing to the gods. As the cult of the sacrificial ritual grows the concept is necessarily and firmly geared to ritual and it is not until the period of the *Upanishads* that the idea of the Perfect Man being essentially a man of supreme knowledge takes deep roots. The *Upanishads* mention virtues like self-restraint, charity and compassion as essential elements in the process of perfection but they are not perfection in themselves.⁸ The instrument of transcendence is the knowledge that liberates, the knowledge and subjective experience of the unity of the Atman and the Brahman.⁹ It is also then that the concept of yoga increasingly

⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, I, pp. 109-11

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-11 ⁸ *Bṛihadaranyakopaniṣad*, V, ii, 3

⁹ *Shvetashvataropaniṣad*, V, 13

dominates thinking. The function of yoga is to end the "illusion of a manifold universe"¹⁰ by bringing home to the aspirant that what really exists is unity whereas diversity is mere appearance. This yoga has eight aspects namely; "(a) *yama*, discipline (consisting in abstinence from doing injury, truthfulness, honesty, chastity, poverty); (b) *niyama*, self-restraint (purity, contentment, asceticism, study, devotion); (c) *asanam*, sitting (in the right place and the correct bodily attitude); (d) *pranayama*, regulation of breath; (e) *pratyahara*, suppression (of the organs of sense); (f) *dharana*, concentration (of the attention); (g) *dhyanam*, meditation; (h) *samadhi*, absorption (complete union with the object of meditation)."¹¹ Practising the yoga and receiving the Grace of the Divine, man transcends life when "he knows nothing further of sickness, old age or suffering, who gains a body out of the fire of yoga. Activity, health, freedom from desire, a fair countenance, beauty of voice, a pleasant odour, fewness of secretions, therein at first the yoga displays its power."¹² There are some aspects of this *Maṇḍala* Perfected which deserve to be noted. R. D. Ranade explains them thus. The Mystic has no desires for "bodily accommodation"; he is without any doubts; he is in possession of spiritual power; he experiences uncommon bliss; he is completely divested of all feeling of fear and is capable of fulfilment of any end that he may contemplate.¹³ The Perfect Man, then, stands astride the universe pervading it and lost in the rapture of utter bliss, of immeasurable power and limitless glory.

With the *Upanishads* there comes into existence the philosophy of the three paths. These are karma, bhakti and dynana. The first is the path of works and ritual, the second is the way of devotion and the last is the path of knowledge. This philosophy of the three paths is based on the assumption that though the quest for perfection is open to all, all men are not alike in their intellectual and emotional abilities and equipment. The hardest and the highest form of the quest of perfection is no doubt that of knowledge which requires a long preliminary training which may take the form of works and devotion. The basis of perfection

¹⁰ P. Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 383 ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 385

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 395

¹³ R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*, II, pp. 348-50

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is morality and the acquisition of virtues like non-violence, truthfulness, a sense of justice, compassion and self-restraint, is not only highly desirable but also absolutely essential for transcendence which is but another name for perfection.¹⁴ The different works like worship, pilgrimage and devotion are designed to inculcate these virtues. But perfection means transformation and is to be realized only through the cleansing power of knowledge.¹⁵ Good thoughts, words and deeds mould the moral character of the aspirant which is later transformed through the instrumentality either of selfless devotion or through the all-surpassing comprehension of the Absolute.

What is the relationship between the Man Perfected and the world? Such a man does not cease to live; on the other hand it is assumed that his continued existence is both necessary and good for the welfare of the world. Though he has nothing further to achieve in the world he functions like a beacon for the rest of humanity and with selfless devotion applies himself to the task of enlightening others. He is not of the world but still is in it though he is not affected by it. And because he is unaffected by the mundane joys and sorrows he can fulfil the higher purpose of helping others in their quest for perfection.

III

Among the Buddhists and the Jainas a similar ideal of the Man Perfected developed. The Buddhist ideal is expressed in the terms *Arhat* and *Bodhisattva* while the Jainas call the Perfect Man the *Kevalin*. The perfect man is, above all, the moral man. He is a man of deep spirituality and profound wisdom which must be distinguished from mere learning.¹⁶ He shows the path of righteousness to others; tells them what is to be avoided; whose mind is serene, being immersed in the joy of comprehension of the truth, who is self-restrained, firm like a rock in happiness as well as misery, deep in his knowledge, unattached to the world though living in it.¹⁷ He is keen on seeing the mote in his own eye before hurrying off to discover the beam in the eyes of others;¹⁸ he is wide-awake;¹⁹ peaceful is his mind, so are his thoughts,

¹⁴ *Mahabharata*, Shanti Pârva, 21, 11-12

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Shanti Parva, 321, 46-52

¹⁶ *Dhammapada*, verse 100 ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76-89 ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50 ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21

words and deeds;²⁰ and at all times he is in complete control of himself.²¹ He delights in possessionlessness and passionlessness, forbearing like the earth itself, and is liberated through the highest development of *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (contemplation) and *panna* (comprehension).²² Living in the world he is like the bee gathering honey from flowers without damaging their fragrance or colour.²³ He has passed by the way, is griefless, liberated and knows no burning (of passions) and such is his state that even the gods envy him.²⁴ He is one who has learnt much, who "treasures and hoards what he has been taught, who learns and knows by heart the ideas which, beginning aright and proceeding aright and ending aright, both in letter and in spirit, declares the higher life in all its perfection and purity, who with his lips repeats these ideas, scrutinizes them with his mind, plumbs them with his philosophy, and preaches them both to Almsmen and Almswomen and to the faithful laity of both sexes with an exposition which is at once comprehensive, precise and fluent, as to eradicate propensities".²⁵

Perfection demands a strenuous discipline and Sariputra, the Captain of the Faith, describes this discipline in the following words: "greed is vile, and vile is, resentment. To shed this greed and this resentment, there is the Middle Way which gives us eyes to see and makes us know, leading us on to peace, insight, enlightenment and Nirvana. What is this Middle Way? Why, it is naught but the Noble Eightfold Path of right outlook, right aims, right speech, right action, right means of livelihood, right effort, right mindedness and right concentration; this, Almsmen, is the Middle Way. Yes, sirs; anger is vile and malevolence is vile, envy and jealousy are vile, niggardliness and avarice are vile, hypocrisy and deceit are vile, imperviousness and temper are vile, pride and arrogance are vile, inflation is vile and indolence is vile; for the shedding of inflation and indolence there is the Middle Way—giving us eyes to see, making us know, and leading us on to peace, insight, enlightenment and Nirvana—which is naught but that Noble Eightfold Path."²⁶

The Arhat or the Man Perfected begins by avoiding the two

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96 ²¹ *Ibid.*, 221-2 ²² *Ibid.*, 90-99 ²³ *Ibid.*, 49

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-94

²⁵ *Majjhima Nikaya*, I, p. 213; Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, I, p. 153 ²⁶ Chalmers, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 11-12

extremes of needless physical torment through dire austerities and indulgence in the pleasures of the senses and trains his mind in contemplation and comprehension of the truth upon which he stands as the Man liberated. This was the early Buddhist ideal. It called upon man to exert himself and find transcendence from the limitations of his heart, mind and intellect. After a time it was felt that this ideal was too cold and remote, of little consequence to the mass of suffering humanity. And then, in answer to the changing religious and social needs rose the ideal of the Bodhisattva developed in Mahayana Buddhism. The Bodhisattva (Future Buddha) is the Being of Compassion ever willing to help suffering humanity and who has deferred his own Nirvana till such time as the whole sentient world is liberated from thralldom to decay, disease, death and rebirth. Enlightenment demands infinite labour and the Being of Mercy undertakes it for the good of others; because he can pull others out from the great flood of suffering.²⁷ He is the being compounded of two apparent contradictions where in his wisdom he sees no "beings" but in his compassion he is resolved to save them. "As the *Diamond Sutra* puts it: A Bodhisattva should think thus: "As many beings as there are in the universe of beings—be they egg-born or born from the womb, or moisture-born, or miraculously born; be they with form or without; be they with perception, without perception, or with neither perception nor no-perception—as far as any conceivable universe of beings is conceived; all these should be led by me into Nirvana, into that realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind. And yet, although innumerable beings have been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana. And why? If in a Bodhisattva the perception of a 'being' should take place, he would not be called an 'enlightenment-being' (= *bodhi sattva*)."²⁸

The development of the ideal of the Bodhisattva as the Perfect Man came about due to certain inherent tendencies in Buddhism itself and in the social pressures acting on it. The old Arhat ideal was too individualistic and in the changed situation whereby Buddhism had become a great social force the ideal of the Compassionate Being alone was found socially satisfactory. The Perfect Man has as much of a duty to others as to himself and

²⁷ See E. Conze, *Buddhism, its Essence and Development*, pp. 127-8

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130

it is this fact and its awareness that become apparent in the new postulate of the perfect man.

The Jaina concept of the kevalin is very similar to that of the Buddhist Arhat. It demands a rigorous moral and intellectual discipline based on right belief, right knowledge and right conduct.²⁹ It calls for yoga which is the activity of the body, speech and mind, morally determined and intellectually purified.³⁰ It is only when there is perfect comprehension of the nature of the soul and the world that perfection emerges as a force which then must be socially directed.

IV

Early Buddhism and Jainism were philosophies of renunciation, by and large. There came a reaction to them in the form of a philosophy of activism with its own image of the Perfect Man. He is the *Stitapramāṇya* of the *Gita*. He is the man, steadfast in spirit and of settled intelligence. He has put away all the desires of the mind, his spirit is content in itself untroubled by sorrow, unaffected by joyous elation, passionless and fearless, with his intelligence firmly set, who draws away his senses from the world like a tortoise withdrawing itself into its shell; whose senses are under perfect control; who is immersed in contemplation, who is ever wide-awake when others are fast asleep; in whom the world can enter without any disturbance like the ocean receives the waters of all the rivers and yet is not swollen with them, and who acts free from longing.³¹ As Radhakrishnan points out this saint has "points in common with the superman of Nietzsche, with the deity-bearers of Alexander. Joy, serenity, the consciousness of inward strength and of liberation, courage and energy of purpose and a constant life in God are their characteristics. They represent the growing point of human evolution. They proclaim, by their very existence, character and consciousness, that humanity can rise above its assumed limitations, that the tide of evolution is pushing forward to a new high level. They give us the sanction of example and expect us to rise above our present selfishness

²⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, and C. A. Moore, (Eds), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, p. 252 ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256

³¹ *The Bhagavadgita*, II, 55-72; S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, pp. 122-9

and corruption. Wisdom is the supreme means of liberation, but this wisdom is not exclusive of devotion to God and desireless work. Even when alive the sage rests in Brahman, and is released from the unrest of the world. The sage of steady wisdom lives a life of disinterested service."³²

The idea of the *Sthitapradnya* represents the highest degree of socialization reached by the concept of the Perfect Man. The Perfect Man of the *Upanishads*, though he continues to live the natural span of his life after his liberation, is not living for the sake of the world. The *Sthitapradnya*, on the other hand, is a man of action, fully committed to the cares of the world but acting in the highest moral way, namely, that of disinterested service in selfless action. He has nothing to gain from that service but the laws of his own being are such that he has to render that service. It should be remembered that the *Gita* began to assume its present form during the period between 200 B.C.-A.D. 200 which was a period of intense social, economic and spiritual crisis. The Mauryan empire had fallen and the land witnessed invasions and foreign rule. The whole social structure was menaced with disintegration and an entire way of life was being engulfed in the flood of doubt, uncertainty and desire to run away from the world. That trend had to be checked and the *Gita* attempts to stem the tide of disintegration through its message of action, incessant action. It has, however, to reckon with the prevailing temper of renunciation and it tries to accommodate it by characterizing ideal action as selfless action. It also elaborates the philosophy of the three paths of karma, bhakti and dnyana.³³ It insists on social duties and advocates the ideal of the Man Perfected through action, devotion and contemplation.

Some of the metaphysical implications of the concept of the Perfect Man in the *Gita* are elaborated in the Vedanta.³⁴ The *Jivanamukta* is not concerned with action as such though as a true believer in God he loves the whole universe. Radhakrishnan states the position in the following words: "True peace and excellence lie not in self-assertion, not in individual striving for one's own good, but in offering oneself as a contribution to the true

³² Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, pp. 129-30

³³ The *Bhagavadgita*, XII, 6-12

³⁴ Rene Guenon, *Man and his becoming according to the Vedanta*, pp. 178ff

being of the universe. Egoism is the greatest evil, and love and compassion are the greatest good. By identifying ourselves with the social good, we truly gain our real ends. Every individual must subdue his senses, which make for self-assertion; pride must give place to humility, resentment to forgiveness, narrow attachment to family to universal benevolence. It is not so much the deed that is valuable as the will to suppress one's selfish will and assert the will of society. Duties are the opportunities afforded to man to sink his separate self and grow out into the world."³⁵ Shankara accepted the standards of his age and endorsed ritualism and the philosophy of works, the regulations of caste and the mores of the ashramas. Though some of the liberated ones are interested in the minimum of activity others may undertake work for the world (*lokasamgraha*). While this interpretation is correct and is readily accepted by the discerning student of the Vedānta it cannot be denied that on the level of the thinking of the common man the Vedānta did tend to diminish the positivistic and activistic content of the old message of the *Gita*, of selfless involvement in the affairs of the world by the Perfect Man, through a one-sided understanding of concepts such as *Māya*.

IV

In the medieval ages the concept of the Perfect Man was treated on the two levels of understanding namely, those of detachment from the world and involvement in the world. Poets like Kabir sang of the beauty of the world reflecting the beauty of God and called upon man to renounce meaningless ritualism and the chanting of prayers, to open their eyes and look at the world.³⁶ The Sufi mystics of Islam, though rapt in the joy of the mystical experience of God did not forget the world at all times. Sheikh Sharfuddin Yahya Maniri, who lived in the 14th century A.D. (d. 1380), "laid particular stress on the service of humanity as a part of mystic discipline". In one of his letters he said "in this dark world it is incumbent to serve the needy by the pen, tongue, wealth and position. Prayers, fasting and voluntary worship are good as far as they go, but they are not as useful

³⁵ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, II, p. 614

³⁶ Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p. 164

as making others happy."³⁷ Tulsidas, the great Hindi poet and contemporary of Akbar, makes of his hero Rama, a figure closely integrated in the social situation of the times, ever mindful of his duties towards the world and ever enthusiastic in bringing succour to the needy and the oppressed.³⁸ Tukaram, a contemporary of the great Shivaji, sings, "he who treats those who are miserable and oppressed as his own kith and kin, him you should recognize as a sadhu (good man) and know that God dwells there."³⁹ Ramadas, a contemporary of Tukaram, was as much interested in this world as in the next and his ideal was to create conditions of high morality and devotion and freedom in the land of his birth, Maharashtra.

Of course, most of these saint poets also sang of the futility of the world and the necessity of transcending it: but that was inevitable for such was the influence of the other trend we noticed, the trend of not involving the Perfect Man in the affairs of the world. They insisted on pointing out the need for detachment from the greed and misery of the world into a universe of contemplation and devotion of God which alone would remain when everything else dissolved into nothingness. Life around had far too much of war, destruction and devastation, of vicissitudes of political fortune, of subjection and terror, for them to forget the lessons taught by the older doctrines born of social crises. But in spite of the centuries-old influence of that kind they often took note of the world and pictured their Perfect Man as acting within the world and for the good of the world, both socially and spiritually.

One of the consequences of the Western impact on India was the rapid secularization of many of the areas of life which were, in the olden days, permeated with religious influences. After the initial shock of defeat was over the Indian mind began to ponder over the causes of Western domination over the country in spite of its long cultural tradition and past political greatness. There was a secularization of the law and administration of justice, education and politics and with the rise of the politics of protest—nationalism—different concepts began to prevail. From the time

³⁷ Yusuf Husain, *Glances of Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 52

³⁸ W. C. Macdougall, *The Way of Salvation in the Ramayan of Tulsidas*, pp. 215-17

³⁹ P. M. Lad, (Ed), *Shree Tukaramache Abhanga*, p. 57

of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833) to Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) the social reform movement was a strong force in Indian life. There was a revival of religion as evidenced by the activities of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and the Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayananda (1824-1883). This revival led to a reinterpretation of some of the basic tenets of Hinduism and in this work of reinterpretation there was a critical examination of the sacred texts. From the closing decades of the nineteenth century until 1947 politics was growing in ever-expanding circles and leaders like Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) turned to the *Gita* for the task of formulating the first principles of their political philosophy. Tilak stressed the importance of action in the life of man and through his speeches, writings and political movement activated the whole country. Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) is an interesting and significant example of the progress of a mind from terrorism to mysticism. All these thinkers were firmly committed to the basic principles of Hinduism and sought from its scriptures inspiration for their work. But all of them were also profoundly influenced by the Western impact and in their speculations on the nature of perfection there is a natural emphasis on the social obligations of perfection. This is best illustrated by the concept of Satyagraha as formulated by Gandhi.

Satyagraha means insistence on truth and is both a way of action and an entire philosophy of life. Says Gandhi: "Life is a very complex thing, and truth and non-violence present problems, which often defy analysis and judgement. One discovers truth and the method of applying the only legitimate means of vindicating it, that is satyagraha or soul-force, by patient endeavour and silent prayer."⁴⁰ The philosophy of satyagraha is based on steadfast loyalty to truth as the sole guiding principle in life. And truth being synonymous with non-violence, satyagraha, as a method, involves the complete rejection of hatred in thought, word and deed. A satyagrahi is a believer in God and acts with the constant awareness of the necessity of conforming to the ordinances of God. If these involve breaking the existing laws he is willing to do so and suffer the consequences for "disobedience to the law of the state becomes a peremptory duty when it comes into conflict with the law of God".⁴¹

⁴⁰ N. K. Bose, (Ed) *Selections from Gandhi*, p.7 ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-5

In Gandhi's view, then, the satyagrahi is the Man Perfected. He is equipped for his task by a purificatory discipline. The essential parts of this discipline are firstly Brahmacharya which may be rendered as "the fullest control over all the senses in thought, word and deed". It does not necessarily mean rejection of marriage but self-control and sublimation of desire. Secondly, there is the total acceptance of truth and non-violence with its correlate of love for all and hatred for none. Thirdly, the satyagrahi is fearless for he is utterly convinced that his actions are in full conformity with the demands of truth and the will of God. Fourthly, this discipline also insists that the dedicated man must live a life of as few possessions as possible for a life of voluntary poverty is essential for the creation of the right attitude to life.⁴²

The philosophy of satyagraha is obviously based on certain fundamental tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. But whereas these ideas in their bearing on the concept of the Perfect Man related to the life of the spirit more than life here and now in Gandhian thinking there is more of the social element introduced. The Perfect Man is no longer the aloof spectator but a person deeply involved in the trials and tribulations of humanity. He works in the world and suffers for it and through his work and suffering brings about a desired transformation in the nature of man and the structure of society within which man lives. Gandhism insists on changing the world but its technique of change and final end of that process of change are different from the accepted political philosophies in India and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries. The technique of change is non-violent non-cooperation with evil, a change of heart through non-violence and satyagraha. The society it aims at creating is a society of spiritually elevated beings interested in few possessions and living a life of simplicity, purity and austerity. Satyagraha, thus, is a well-integrated ideal and philosophy of the whole life of man and not just an instrument of politics which it was understood to be by many because Gandhi's experiments in satyagraha were prominently undertaken in areas of life which were political.

Two figures have fascinated the Indian mind through the ages. One is that of Rama, the epic hero and God, whose role as the Perfect Man has been depicted with such force by Valmiki in the

⁴² G. N. Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 81-3

Ramayana: It was this ideal which appealed to Tulsidas. Rama is not only the ideal ruler but also a hero who fights in the cause of righteousness and destroys the forces of evil. He is the Ideal Man who does His duty with single-minded conviction and in the unshaken faith that as a consequence of his actions the regimen of right will prevail. The other figure is that of Krishna of the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavadgita*. Krishna is both the diplomat and the philosopher as well as the warrior. Rama appealed to Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo was fascinated by Krishna. Aurobindo speaks of Krishna as the Divinity that has appeared in the world for the sake of destroying the forces of evil and ensuring that the rule of right over might shall not be weakened. As it is pointed out "the famous world-form of Krishna as described in the *Bhagavadgita*, according to Aurobindo, is not a fiction or a metaphor but a truth of the higher and subtler planes of existence. The political and historical conclusions following from this concept of the *Zeitgeist* are stated by Aurobindo. "All have been moving inevitably towards the catastrophe of Kurukshetra. Men did not know it: those who would have done everything possible to avert the calamity, helped its coming by their action or inaction; those who had a glimpse of it strove in vain to stop the wheels of Fate... but the *Zeitgeist* overbore all for who could resist the purpose of the *Zeitgeist*? There were strong men and Yogins, subtle statesmen, leaders of men, kings of thought and action, the efflorescence of a mighty intellectual civilization at its height. A little turning to the right instead of to the left on the part of a few of these would, it might seem, have averted the whole catastrophe.... (But) the *Zeitgeist* proclaims the utter helplessness of the mightiest and the sure fulfilment of God's decree."⁴³ There are two points to be noted in this line of argument. The first is that so long as there are human beings there will always be a Kurukshetra (the battlefield where the forces of good and evil come into conflict) and the second is if a Kurukshetra is inevitable the appearance of the Perfect Man is inexorable. This Perfect Man is no mere human hero but an emanation of the Divine itself descending into the world to fulfil a historic function. Perfection, then, is an aspect of divinity and reveals itself in the affairs of human beings from time to time as a matter of the necessity of

⁴³ V. P. Varma, "Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of History", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, XLII (pts. III-IV), Sept.-Dec. 1956, pp. 383-84

divine intervention in the affairs of the world.

The Man Perfected, according to S. Radhakrishnan is the free spirit. These free spirits are "those individuals who have realized their true being, are the integrated ones who have attained personal integrity. Their reason is turned to light, their heart into love, and their will into service. Their demeanour is disciplined and their singleness of spirit is established. Ignorance and craving have lost their hold. They are dead to pride, envy and uncharitableness. The world in which they live is no more alien to them. It is hospitable, not harsh. It becomes alive, quakes, and sends forth its grandeur of the eternal. These free spirits reach out towards the warmth in all things. They have that rarest quality in the world, simple goodness, besides which all the intellectual gifts seem a little trivial. They are meek, patient, long-suffering. They do not judge others because they do not pretend to understand them. Because of their eager selfless love they have the power to soothe the troubled heart. To those in pain their presence is like the cool soft hand of someone they love, when their head is hot with fever. The released individuals are artists in creative living. With an awareness of the Eternal, they participate in the work of the world."⁴⁴ Being a staunch follower of Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta* Radhakrishnan draws his image of the Man Perfected along the general lines of the visor of the Jivanmukta but there is reason to argue that there is some influence of the Bodhisattva and the Satyagrahi in this concept.

Our survey of the history of the concept of the Man Perfected indicates the variations noticeable from age to age. From the Jivanamukta to the satyagrahi the concept has been, however, shaped by certain common trends in Indian thinking. There has been a comprehension of this concept at two distinct levels of thought. First there is the interpretation of the Man Perfected in individual and necessarily spiritual terms. The second is the interpretation in social, and equally necessarily, in terms of the "here and now". The dominance of each of these views in the respective ages was closely linked to the happenings within the country, happenings which profoundly disturbed the prevailing pattern of social, economic life. These were times of wars and social crises and the initial reaction was one of turning away from the world of form and change for absorption into the formless

⁴⁴ Schilpp, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5

and the changeless. But this trend was followed by a determination to take matters in hand and shape the forces of history differently. In that context the social content of the concept of the Man Perfected was emphasized. But common to both phases are certain postulates. These are that perfection is a moral phenomenon. It is also emotional, intellectual and spiritual. But perfection, though it begins with man turning inwards, can find fulfilment only when he turns outwards towards the world, and, like a benevolent spirit, uses his moral and spiritual force as an instrument for bringing about desired changes in the world. Perfection begins when evil is destroyed and ignorance dispelled, when the self becomes great enough to embrace the whole world. The last phase as revealed in the thoughts of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, enlarges the social content of the concept of the Man Perfected and concludes that the very fact of perfection must impel the spirit of the Man Perfected to attempt to lead the world from imperfection to perfection.

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